A photograph of a person holding a large, round, golden-brown loaf of bread over their face, completely obscuring it. The person is wearing a green scarf and a dark purple sweater. A hand with a ring is visible holding the bottom of the loaf. The background is a solid light blue.

A Cookbook to Art and Integration in Finland

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Abstract

This study explores the current social and political situation regarding the multiplicity of cultures in Finland and their integration. It is a collaborative project, designed to operate on many levels, investigating the role art can play in areas of education and learning, interacting with the public and governmental programmes.

This research revolves around interviews with people working within the food and integration sectors in Finland, workshops with small groups, and public interventions/exchanges.

Each element has been documented by using one or more of the following methods: photographs, video, voice recording, personal notes, stories, drawings.

Food is used as a mediator to connect people and transfer cultural values through the practice of storytelling. As a result of this study, personal stories regarding food have been artistically explored and collated becoming a collective narrative that considers people's similarities and differences. This process has allowed for the discussion of delicate issues pertaining to an increasingly multicultural Finnish society. Therefore, this study can be an example for understanding the society we live in and the role art can play in integration for newcomers, whilst exposing the general public to other cultures and traditions in Finland.

The work has been presented in the form of public interventions, videos, gallery installations, a publication, and online as a website and blog; allowing not only participants to engage but also the general public.



FIGURE 1. Preparing for workshops with various ingredients, Rabat, 2014

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction	3
Background and artistic intent	5
Research questions	8

CHAPTER 2

A Local Perspective	13
Immigration and society – a Helsinki perspective	14
The Other and the media	16
The integration system and projects	18
Meeting places and face-to-face	21
Food	22
Reflections	23

CHAPTER 3

Workshops and Learning Pedagogy	25
Pedagogy (learning theories and teaching methods)	26
The first year	29
The second year	41
The third year	46
Reflections	60

CHAPTER 4

Intervention, Interaction and xchange	65
Theoretical background	65
The changing aesthetics	66
Dialogical aesthetics	67
Relevant projects in the field	69
Taste Exchange	75
Other Our Cuisine = Our Stories outcomes	80
Reflections	82

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion	85
Evaluating research questions	85
Futures possibilities of the study	87

NOTES	89
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Figure 2.
Taste Exchange,
Granitin Aukio,
Riihimäki, 2013







Figure 3.
Taste Exchange at
Ptarmigan, Tallin, 2014



Chapter 1:

Introduction

This Master's thesis experiments with new ways of working, within the community as an artist, towards social change. My main purpose as an artist is to motivate myself and others to fear less and become more comfortable with ourselves, others, difference and change. My thesis project allowed me, and participants in the case study, to see meaning in our own experiences and those of others.

This study provides an example of one way of working to combine art, pedagogy and current social and political issues, with the aim of social innovation.

THE STUDY INVOLVES A NUMBER OF STAGES:

1. In the first stage, through personal interviews with locals working within food culture and integration, discussions revolve around Finland as a multicultural society. Integration and Finland's current situation are explored focusing on knowledge sharing between cultures with food as its medium.
2. In the second stage the constructivist learning theory is used to develop a learning experience in the form of workshops. The reader can witness the unfolding process of dialogical exchange and the techniques used to facilitate it. In this stage content is produced and gathered.
3. The third stage begins a discussion of dialogical aesthetics and art projects working in a similar field. The workshop content is made visible by exchange through public interventions, the website, a publication, and exhibitions.

As a result it can be seen that an art project can provide knowledge related to community, with emerging needs being noticed. Food itself is the medium that connects people through ritual, emotional attachment, local and temporary memory and across generations. It forms bonds allowing the transfer of cultural values whilst making people more open for social interactions. By using a variety of techniques incorporating smell, taste, touch, and by hearing others' stories, people can gain new and deeper insights into their own lives and the lives of those in their local community.

The following writings are purely my own views and take on the project. The case study was initially produced as an artists' collaboration with Sari T.M. Kivinen. Between us we have differing views and ideas on what the project is, whom it is for, and what the most important elements are. Also for the participants, in workshops or engaging in public interventions or discussions, the project has held a variety of meanings.

*'The world is made of stories and
changed by stories'*

— John Jordan, Artist /Activist

Background and artistic intent

MY BACKGROUND: In Australia my life was filled with friends and acquaintances from a plethora of backgrounds, cultures and traditions. Leaving Australia, I migrated north to New York, London, Marrakech, and finally Helsinki in 2010. I was excited to be in Finland as I had grown up in Australia with a strong relationship to my grandmother (mummi). My mummi, with her Finnish cooking and décor, even enrolled me in traditional Finnish dance classes.

When looking around Helsinki, although I did not look like people here, I had a deeper sense and understanding of myself and, in particular, my actions and reservedness. I was accustomed with not looking like everyone else and, although many people were friendly, I quickly found I was not Finnish enough. Older people in small towns stared at me in the street and a person from the Immigration Office yelled down the phone: "But how are you Finnish if you don't speak the language?"

This was confusing, as growing up everyone not only looked different, but also spoke different languages and ate different food. This did not mean they were not Australian. I wish I had said: *But I am a Finnish citizen, my grandparents fought in Finnish wars, who are you to tell me if I am Finnish or not due to language.*

So began a personal journey of realising, once again, others were telling me I did not belong. In Australia it was because I was an artist not interested in galleries, in Morocco because I was from 'the West' with a strange accent and now in Finland because I did not speak the language, did not look like a typical Finn, was not born in Finland, am only half Finnish, and the list could go on. Why was it always other people deciding who was a part of things and who was not?

Throughout my life and travels I have learned to be not so fearful of difference and change. I realised others had not had the same experiences, and were fearful of difference in case it changed them and their lives. My personal philosophy is not about achieving answers but the process of trying to find them and not accepting without question conventional views or traditional authority.

MY ARTISTIC INTENT is to apply artistic methods to empower myself and others, personally and collaboratively, to make changes in our world.

1. By investigating and addressing issues of importance in a way that creates a space for individual and collective agency within governmental policies, societal interactions and individual thoughts.¹
2. By exploring art in the public's interest by being responsive to local contexts and cultures, foregrounding social issues, political activism and community collaboration.²
3. By striving to transform the world and not to represent it, demanding a more accessible and egalitarian form of art, whilst transforming the consciousness of both myself and my co-participants.³

My artistic identity is strongly based on my willingness to listen openly and actively. My observations, formed by training, projects and lived experiences, are used to challenge others' perceptions so a new set of insights can emerge from both sides.⁵

My work does not revolve around physical objects but social processes catalysing dialogue, the exchange of ideas, and the collective generation of new aesthetic paradigms.⁶ It is necessary to shift from a concept of art based on self-expression and imagery of utopian realities to one based on the ethics of communicative exchange and ways of living within the existing real.⁷ The latitude allowed to art in our society provides the operative condition for this conscious changing work.

THE CASE STUDY began as a frustration on the structure of the Finnish system for newly arrived 'immigrants'. When people first arrive in Finland they usually enroll to study the Finnish language, which as a course includes knowledge on the local culture. This is extremely helpful for participants to integrate in society, giving them communication skills but also knowledge ranging from the Finnish system to local personality traits. But integration is two-way. It cannot work when only one side is being educated - what about integration from the rest of society - the Finnish majority? Do they need to learn about the cultures, customs and experiences of others in their society?

This is the base of how the socially engaged project *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* was formed. The idea was twofold:

1. To bring together individuals from various cultural backgrounds, ages and professions to exchange recipes, cook together, and effectively share life stories connected to food ingredients.
2. To expose the Finnish general public to these other cultures, traditions and knowledge of people living in Finland through storytelling.

The project would use a dialogical aesthetic with the goal of exploring unique knowledge and experiences, opening individuals to different cultures. The embodiment of the stories shared (via written stories, recipes and documentation) would also constitute the project's aesthetic.

The work would allow a glimpse of an ideal future where we will be open to radical otherness, rather than view it as a threat. Acknowledging the specific identities of our interlocutors and conceiving of them as co-participants in the transformation of both self and society.⁸ The work of art would be a token to be redeemed at a later date slowly impacting a social consciousness.⁹

I deeply identify with the 'immigrant' or 'expat' community as we are all culturally, economically and socially similar. It was essential the gap between myself as

an artist and the participants was closed in order to become mutually engaged in manifesting a counter-consciousness.¹⁰

CHAPTER 2 ...gives an introduction to the history and current local perspectives in Helsinki through personal interviews with professionals working within immigration and integration projects and services in Finland.

After reflecting on this the project was developed according to societal needs.

CHAPTER 3 ...gives an overview of the workshops that took place from 2012-14 as part of the case study, accompanied by the theoretical framework used behind the learning process. It begins by discussing the first stages of the case and is then divided into three sections by year: one, two, and three.

There are reflections at the end of each year, and the theory used is weaved throughout the chapter.

A final overall reflection offers a deeper understanding of the experiences explored while implementing these theories.

CHAPTER 4 ...investigates how the project expanded into the public sphere interacting with society. I begin a discussion on dialogical aesthetics and other relevant art projects in reference to the exchanges that took place as part of the project.

CHAPTER 5 ...here I provide an evaluation of the research questions that have been explored through a multi stage process rather than a singular cultural product. I also elaborate on the future of the project as it continues after the completion of this thesis.

At the end of this chapter are the reference notes.

In the next section I discuss the formulation of the research questions in connection to socially engaged art.

Research questions

Although socially engaged art has been in practice in various ways over the last century, the past few decades has seen it become more deeply discussed and theorised.¹¹ My artistic practice with its mix of pedagogy, public intervention, and collaborative work with non-artists has often been difficult to describe. I go through periods of thinking I am not an artist as I am more interested in sharing knowledge within my community than being alone in a studio space producing objects. Over time I have seen that there are artists who are more interested in providing context to situations rather than content for art exhibitions.

*Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time a group of visual artists has developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language interacting with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – based on engagement.*¹²

Suzanne Lacy

And as Nato Thompson states:

*Whether or not we agree with this mode of working—a mode we could summarize as people working with culture in the realm of the social—you should understand that this kind of engagement is a growing, global phenomenon.*¹³ He continues by saying that artists today are: *escaping the rules of formalism, social works must encounter the complicated terrain of people—in all of their complexity. From language to sociology, from pedagogy to urban planning, the skill sets needed for this way of working are vast.*¹⁴

According to Kester in *Conversation Pieces*:

*Artists can comprehend these broader interrelations because they are not limited by a specific area and can more easily view them as interrelated parts of a larger whole. Such knowledge is used to assess interconnections among various disciplines at a given time.*¹⁵

The issue no longer resides in broadening the boundaries of art but in experiencing arts capacities of resistance within the overall social arena, by being in contact with other, adjacent cultural practices.¹⁶ Defining art by its function of being an open space in which questions can be asked and critical analyses articulated, gives the opportunity to approach a problem unconventionally, naively and open-mindedly.¹⁷

In using this socially engaged way of working I decided to use food as a medium and tool for communication. This would allow people from a variety of cultures,

professions and ages to relate and bring their own personal knowledge to share with others. I wanted to work with intimate groups and thought of the type of learning outcomes these interactions could produce.

I ASKED THE QUESTION: *How can you structure a learning process so knowledge can be transferred between different cultures? What types of learning processes happened throughout the project?*

Once this intimate learning process had taken place I wanted the content to be visible to a wider audience, so **I ASKED THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

How can public interactions and exchanges open people to personal insights about themselves and the society they live in? Can art and food be used to gain insights into other cultures and traditions effecting interactions within the local community?

The experience gained from exploring these questions would also help me look at the wider question of:

How can a socially engaged approach be used to increase awareness and question current social, political and personal issues?

The research questions are evaluated at the end of the writings.

The historical and current perspectives regarding immigration and integration in Finland's capital region are introduced in the following chapter.



FIGURE 4. Blindfolded sense activity as part of workshops at Kulte Gallery & Editions, Rabat 2014





Chapter 2:

A Local Perspective

IN CHAPTER 2 I dive into the local context by asking professionals in the food culture and integration sectors to discuss past and current situations in Finland, reflecting on what changes could be made to improve the social and political situation. Although the main focus of this thesis paper is on the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* project this chapter gives a background to the social context in order to understand, as thoroughly as possible, the specific *conditions* and nuances from which the project grew.¹

From personal experiences of exclusion I wanted to find out what was really going on in Finland on a larger scale. Who are these *Others* living in Finland? How has the country changed regarding immigration? What was lacking in the social climate that art could possibly bring to the surface? And how could hatred in human social interactions be reduced? I began by researching what had been happening in my city - Helsinki.

This chapter gives a short history of integration in Finland, from a historical view and through accounts gathered from personal interviews, publications and reports. I provide examples of government programmes and integration support currently in place and issues regarding the *Other* spoken of in the media. When I speak of the *Other* I am specifically referring to people from other cultures. The reflections from this research process give me clues to how art can be used to open society towards the *Other* and difference.

The following research was done over the course of the case study from 2012–2015.

Immigration and society – a Helsinki perspective.

Finnish immigration is closely related to its history and geographical position. Important periods were from 1890 until the Second World War, and the 1990s. During the Russian rule, from 1890 until 1917, immigrants to Helsinki came mostly from Russia, its Baltic provinces and Sweden.² In 1900 eight per cent of Helsinki's inhabitants had been born abroad.³ Between the Second World War and 1970 immigration to Finland was low with more Finns emigrating to far off lands.

The second immigration period began in 1990 when the law was ratified allowing Ingrians (who had left in the 17th century) to return to Finland from Russia/Estonia. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought a small flow of refugees amidst political fears of the possibility of millions of Russian asylum seekers. Today the largest group of foreign nationals come from the former Soviet Union – mainly Russia and Estonia – with more than half being Ingrian return migrants.⁴ The second group of immigrants was Somali refugees, for whom the United Nation's High Committee of Refugees chose Finland as their destination.

These new immigrant groups arrived in Finland during a heavy recession, which caused mass unemployment among the main population, a situation that especially affected the newcomers. National unemployment rose from 3.5 per cent in 1990 to 17 percent in 1995. Among the immigrant population the rate of unemployment was around 50 per cent.⁵

When the recession was at its deepest in the early 1990s, resentful attitudes towards the newcomers were high among Finns, with the media playing an important role in shaping these views.⁶ The biggest change was the growth of immigrants from outside Europe and the media played on anxieties related to the influx of immigrants from different cultural backgrounds.

In personal interviews with Finns who grew up in the 1960s and 70s, they expressed how extremely different Finland was now. With the biggest change happening in the early 1990s when people from nationalities that looked different broke up, as one interviewee stated, *the pale shadelessness of white everywhere*.⁷ According to another, immigration started with the Chileans, and then the Somalis. Tabloid headlines played a big role in how people viewed Somalis and immigration.⁸

Was it that the *Other* had just arrived in Finland or was it that the *Other* now looked different with darker skin and a different religion?

The number of Russian-language residents doubled in the 2000s; in 2014 about half of immigrants in Helsinki were still born in Russia or Estonia. Even considering this, it seemed that only non-white people were seen to be immigrants or the *Other*.⁹ *It is deep in the Finnish people's mindset that immigrants look a certain way.*¹⁰

As Saido Mohamed, an advisor for the Finnish League for Human Rights, and Refugee Woman of the year 2011, states: *Individuals encounter prejudices and stereotypes aimed at specific ethnic groups in various aspects of life. This is particularly relevant to those groups that are at the lowest level of the Finnish ethnic hierarchy, such as Somalis and many Muslim background groups.*¹¹ From Robin Harms experience of working as an advisor with the Ombudsman of Non-discrimination his view is that *you are mostly going to face discrimination in Finland if you look differently, if you're black or if you're Muslim or have a name that connects you with being a Muslim.*¹² Discrimination seemed to be based on a 'visual pathology' that depended on generalised signs of difference rather than a willingness to acknowledge each individuals unique character.¹³

But immigration and immigrants are now a part of society with Helsinki being a multicultural city. There is more on offer for people from different backgrounds with services bearing in mind that they are not only for Finnish and Swedish speaking users. For example: in the capital region previously all services were developed by the majority population, now more immigrants are making their own projects and developing services according to their needs.¹⁴

Many interviewed were concerned that although Helsinki in particular was more multicultural - similar to most cities in Europe - it was far from being London or Paris and could clearly be felt in the way Finns interacted with foreigners in general. As one interviewee stated: *When I travel in big European cities I feel that being different is not even noticed, it's ordinary, and everybody is different.*¹⁵

All expressed worry about how multiculturalism is reflected in politics and how not enough is being done about everyday racism seen in the media. *What you see in the media, what you hear politicians saying and getting away with, it is really shocking.*¹⁶

Many also voiced concerns regarding the specific types of employment foreigners could get and were very rarely represented in certain spheres of life, i.e. on television, in politics, and in big companies where there are only people of Finnish origin.¹⁷ There is still high unemployment among immigrants due to their marginalisation in the labor market. A high level of education does not protect foreign-background residents from unemployment as efficiently as it does the domestic population. Those coming from other EU member states or from the rest of Scandinavia have been employed most successfully. Those coming from Africa or the Middle East have had most difficulties in finding a job.¹⁸ There are certain fields where immigrants are now being accepted, such as: bus drivers, cleaners and practical nurses. The key question no longer revolves around the *Other* not knowing the language or being educated but the attitudes and discrimination of the employers towards the recruitment of immigrants.¹⁹

*The biggest difference is the conversation culture. We live in these two separate realities of what is actually happening and what is spoken about. And of course our political system and our rising nationalist agendas that are moving all around Europe not just in Finland, they are causing this drift that is becoming less and less connected with the reality.*²⁰

The Other and the media

When the political and economic situation is not at its peak, issues regarding the *Other* are hotly discussed in the media, online forums and panel discussions on television with traditional responses of blaming people considered to be the *Other*. This is often one way, the *Others* voices are rarely heard and the media seem more interested in telling the *Others* who they are and what they do than letting them speak for themselves. Without a platform for people to directly and personally learn and experience with the *Other*, media representations can be believed.

Dealing with difference can often engage feelings, attitudes, and emotions that produce fears and anxieties, at deeper levels than can be simply explained.²¹ Encountering the *Other* can be both an intimidating and an exciting experience.²² Society often has a negative and even hurtful mentality toward those who are defined as different, using otherness to reinforce its own fixed identity. The capacity for empathy and to imagine the *Others* position can become the basis for communication and understanding, radically altering our sense of self.²³

In October 2013 a Finnish TV programme, *Silminnäkijä* (Eyewitness) on YLE sent three researchers - a native-born ethnic Finn, a Russian and a Somali immigrant - to test how Finns react to people of different ethnicities within society. It was quickly realised that life in Finland can take on a different tone, depending on your skin colour and perceived ethnicity.²⁴

All three men had lived in the country for a long period and spoke the language well. Each had the same cover story with similar education, job experience and financial status, but with one difference – a name that made each researcher's ethnic origin very clear. All applied for a job, accommodation and tried to get into a nightclub under the same conditions.²⁵ They all phoned about the same ten jobs. The Finnish member was invited to an interview for two, the ethnic Russian was also invited to two, but the Somali was not asked to an interview, with one employer saying he no longer had any time available to interview applicants. However, the same employer found time immediately for the Finnish applicant.²⁶

It soon became obvious that the basic things we all do at some point in our lives can become considerably difficult or even impossible if you are noticeably Russian, have a Muslim-sounding name, or have dark skin.²⁷

Although the law forbids discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, the experiment records clear evidence of prejudice. In a country which prides itself on an equal and fair society, the programme producer was struck that so many felt it acceptable to deny someone access to a flat or job, or treat them with mistrust or hostility, simply because of their ethnicity. The Finnish researcher was also shocked saying he has been living in a bubble and things he takes for granted are not so easy for people who do not look or sound like him.²⁸ While it may shock some viewers, most dark skinned immigrants who have lived in the country long

enough will relate to the experience of the Somali in the programme and will not be surprised by discrimination.²⁹

As an interviewee stated: *If you follow the media its only bad news about immigrants so maybe you have the wrong picture.* But things get complicated when a front page in the Helsinki Sanomat (the biggest and most read newspaper in the capital region) is also the number one conversation topic and is the main form of news and opinion making in Helsinki.

It's because we're still not used to having foreigners in Finland, is often the justification. But traditionally there have been a lot of different cultures in Finland, this is not a new thing. You find youngsters of foreign backgrounds who were born and brought up here and think of themselves as Finnish. Modern Finland is international and this investigation shows that attitudes still have a long way to go.³⁰

What is the current reality? How does the integration system work? And what projects are produced as part of this system?

The integration system and projects

The Finnish Government Integration Programme 2012–2015 is focused on immigrants receiving guidance in finding employment through language and work training.³¹

A registered unemployed immigrant's situation is assessed by the Employment and Economic Activity Office. From this assessment an individual integration plan is drawn pin pointing services that would best support their integration and help them find a job. The first step in 'integration training' is essentially enrolling to learn Finnish or Swedish. According to the government website immigrants integrate best into Finland if they know Finnish or Swedish, receive training and find work, as work is one of the keys to sound integration.³² The training also has the purpose of offering social and cultural skills making integration into Finnish society easier. The Welcome to Finland brochure gives the following definition of integration in Finland:

*Integration in the Finnish society means that you settle in your new home country and learn how things work in it. Integration can be promoted through interacting and socialising with your neighbors, and activities at the workplace and in leisure time. It is a good idea to be active, ask for advice and follow the Finnish media. Learning Finnish and Swedish is a vital step in integration.*³³

But what if society is not accepting of you because of the way you look? Can taking these above steps allow for integration? It seemed very one-sided with all the work being placed on the immigrant to assimilate.

With the current unemployment rate of immigrants being three times higher than among the original population was it just a matter of language and skills?³⁴

What other services were available in the capital region and did they place as much of an emphasis on this one-way integration process as the governmental system?

VIRKA INFO is a public information service located in the Helsinki City Hall. It is based on three units: general information, immigration advisory and a gallery space. The immigrant advisory offers advice on living and working in the Helsinki area as well as special advice and guidance on immigration issues.³⁵ There is a staff of twelve from different nationalities speaking the major minority languages.

It is not an on-going information source for residents as one staff member said: *if a customer comes in twice then we have failed*. The idea is to lead customers to the right resources within the network. The immigration advisory was located in the eastern suburbs where there are a high number of immigrants, but it is now in the town hall and has merged with the general tourist information.

THE OMBUDSMAN FOR NON-DISCRIMINATION is a person - including her office - and the authority. They deal with discrimination on all other grounds than gender (ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, etc.). Their mandate is clearly defined in the law allowing them to investigate individual cases, review them and make statements.

Their role is two fold: to have a proactive role in trying to insure equal treatment in all spheres of life and a reactive role dealing with individual cases on the suspicion that someone has been discriminated against. For example: when the staff see systemic discrimination or under representation they would contact the authority, the legislator and organisations involving them in a discussion to look at what can be done in terms of establishing rules, guidelines and codes of conduct.

The office was the Ombudsman for Minorities purely dealing with discrimination due to ethnicity, but from the beginning of 2015 it has a much broader band-aid and is under the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice.

LUCKAN is a Finland Swedish NGO producing projects that target the Swedish minority giving the option of learning Swedish when arriving in Finland.

There are three main fields of service: information point for immigrants, events (job searching and social events) and a mentor project (FIKA). The information and guidance desk is a welcome office with four main information areas: language courses, job search, free time activity and studies. Events produced are: hygiene tests and trainings, occupational safety card trainings, job hunting events, language support courses, and a Swedish language café group. The idea of the mentor concept (FIKA) is to open up the Finland Swedish minority, their traditions, and places that are connected to the culture. The mentor couples have monthly events arranged for gathering and meet for six months.

FRIEND OF AN IMMIGRANT MUM is a project produced by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. The initial idea was to encourage immigrant mums to become more active whilst improving their Finnish language and learning about the culture and society around them. It is not a support service but encourages learning the Finnish language with a friend.

It couples Finnish-speaking volunteers with immigrant mums in Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, currently with 250 couples. The project periodically contacts the couples to get updates on the relationship and organises events where woman can gather. Through their friendship knowledge sharing begins with each participant learning about the other's culture and traditions.

REFLECTIONS

When interviewing the above services I asked what importance they placed on knowledge sharing between cultures. Some spoke of how Finnish people were surprised at how much they learned from their mentee/friend, so these projects were actually two-way. I understood two-way sharing could happen naturally but this was never an initial thought when developing programmes, it was always the *Other* who needed help and guidance into the Finnish culture.

Although all these services and programmes had great aspects to them, I felt it was the majority population who needed integration training to open up to new experiences, cultures, people, and difference in general. Integration into Finnish culture is not easy, and ideal integration involves a two-way relationship. Not only should newcomers learn about this country and its people, but their own stories and culture should be shared and listened to by the Finnish general public. The definition of integration needed to be expanded to consider all of society.

It seemed to be mainly Finnish people representing multicultural issues with very little input from the community they were 'helping'. An increase in multicultural activities has seen people embracing other cultures in many ways, with Finnish people wanting to do something to be a part of integration. But was this in order to help the needy like some kind of charity departing their knowledge and wisdom about their own culture, or was it as an open exchange between cultures?

Many interviewed thought that Finnish people being racist was exaggerated. *Finnish people are really nice people in general, but we are also very quiet. So you might get one loud racist in a room of 100 people and the 99 people will be quiet when the racist shouts. They will be really humiliated about the one person, but they will say nothing.*³⁶

An interviewee spoke of how Finns are proud of their country and the positive elements connected with nationalism. Unfortunately, this also hinders new ways of thinking about what constitutes Finland today. Those who oppose use these national sentiments in political rhetoric. Showing positive symbols attached to the national identity and then claiming they are at stake of eroding and being taken away by becoming a multicultural society.³⁷ Immigrants are fundamentally left outside the idea of a Finnish identity due to Western individualism and the modern tradition of self that derives from conquest and erasure of the other.³⁸

For most of the population it seemed to be a mix of fear of the unknown or something different and *dissatisfaction of their own life, own disappointments, own failures coming out as hate to the people and foreigners as an easy target.*³⁹ We are surrounded by hegemonic cultural systems (in the mass media, journalism, etc.) that are heavily based by political ideologies. Getting to know someone from another culture could open the majority population and their perspective of the *Other* allowing negative and unsupported bias to diminish.⁴⁰ *Without having personal contact with people that are different how do you know if you are tolerant or not? How do you know how open you are to new cultures and people that are different to you? You don't I guess.*⁴¹

Meeting places and face-to-face

The project coordinators interviewed discussed the importance of a structure to enable meetings saying: *There needs to be some sort of organisation so they can know each other*, continuing that: *immigrants want to know local people and Finnish people want to know new people who have moved here*.⁴² If meeting places are created I don't think the climate is that negative.⁴³

A two-sided apprehension, Finnish fearful of the *Other* or unknown, and immigrants unsure of the Finnish personality and ways of interaction, complicated the possibility of these personal connections. It seemed there needed to be structured meetings or projects allowing people to feel comfortable to meet and discuss. The additional information of knowing when they would initially meet, why they are being introduced and what kind of relationship was to form seemed essential in the two parties getting to know each other.

Working with this social situation needed to be face-to-face without mediating technology for a sensitive interaction to take place. Experiences gained from personal contact and not through mediated communication with the *Other* were lacking in Finland. Using personal interaction whilst engaging the human senses would open people's minds to *Others* in their community, rather than further retreating toward a closure against them.

The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas speaks of face-to-face relations and how, ethically, people are responsible to one-another in the face-to-face encounter. He argues that the encounter of the *Other* through the face "orders and ordains" us producing a connection which installs a responsibility for the Other in the Self.⁴⁴ Our willingness to interact in an ethical manner with others is linked to the direct experience of 'lived' time and place and meaningful relationships with others.⁴⁵

Once this human tendency to be for the Other is consciously embraced and made part of one's way of being in the world, the possibility for a greater degree of personal fulfilment and happiness is often enhanced.⁴⁶ The more people interact through face-to-face contact, the more they will learn to live with diversity and seek ways to deal with their differences.⁴⁷

Face-to-face interactions and knowledge sharing between cultures in Finland was not happening on the most basic level. There seemed to be a threshold for the majority population to get in contact with people from different cultures. Was it just a lack of personal contact? How then to encourage these interactions taking into consideration the Finnish 'quietness' that people kept mentioning? What could be the main tool used to gather people?

Food

Beginning at a point of equality with something everyone knew but also at a point of difference, food seemed the most logical medium and tool for socialisation. What people eat, their diet, is an important statement and symbol of what they believe and feel strongly about. Food consumption, an everyday activity, is an important component towards a sense of well-being and in constructing social identity.⁴⁹ Eating has many conscious and unconscious meanings that are relevant to understanding a person's particular way of seeing the world. It has always been

*You need to get
really close to
a Finn before
you get to their
table.*⁴⁸

one of the firmest definers of place and is a social vehicle, allowing people to make social distinctions and to establish social linkages.⁵⁰

*When you cook and eat together with others you get to know the good parts of a culture, the good parts of a society, the good parts of a character. This helps many times to break down language and cultural barriers.*⁵¹ Traditional dishes stand as strong cultural references communicating customs passed down through generations. Many dishes have changed over time but others have remained the same since their original inceptions, in both use and significance.⁵²

Finnish people are known for their functional mentality and food has been seen more as fuel, rather than associated with the social aspect of eating together, conversation and sharing food. This showed the potential in food related interactions to foster an inter-cultural community in Finland and the possibility of opening people socially.

Would food work as a platform in listening to each other's stories and experiences in order to appreciate different viewpoints?

Reflections

Food would be the lens to view how people defined themselves, their memories and their culture. Gathering around a table would be the meeting place, where food would not only act functionally, but also allow for greater insight into other cultures by transferring knowledge and values. In contrast to an everyday faux sociality, where we are often not fully present with people, face-to-face encounters would be central.

Instead of problematising race or class based identities I was to use them as a point of strategic alliance against forces of oppression that operate by targeting individuals on this basis.⁵³ In looking at *Others* as a whole, which the media does but the communities themselves do not, instead of seeing them as individual communities I was to challenge stereotypes and fixed models of identity in order to cultivate an openness to difference. The project would attempt to counter the lack of social visibility and political power of the *Other* and endeavour to give them a voice as a strategy of political importance.⁵⁴

Empathy would be encouraged to potentially allow each of us to imaginatively inhabit, learn from and be transformed by another's worldview, eventually perceiving each other as individuals and not abstractions.⁵⁵

I did not have any answers about the current situation but was interested in investigating the role art could play in the area of integration and personal interactions with cultures other than our own. Using art to achieve modest connections, opening up obstructed passages and connecting levels of reality kept apart from one another.⁵⁶

I could see that interdependence and interconnectedness was missing from policy making and that simple human relations were key to opening up the Finnish society. I wanted to experiment with social service issues to see what additions and changes could be made to the system in which other people and the world are viewed as essentially alien forces.⁵⁷ Exploring how the *Other* contribute in making Finland a more rich, diverse and open state, aiming to close discriminatory and racist gaps by promoting a space for shared experiences and the intertwining of self and other, self and society.⁵⁸

The next chapter introduces the initial stages of the case study regarding the workshops with locals from different cultural backgrounds, along with a theoretical framework of the pedagogical structures that were established.



Chapter 3:

Workshops and Learning Pedagogy

This chapter gives an overview of the workshops that took place as part of the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* case study from 2012–2014 along with the theoretical framework used. There were five sets of workshops which are divided into three sections by year: the first, second, and third. Reflections are at the end of each year with a final overall reflection discussing the learning elements and changes that need to be made for the project to grow and become relevant within a wider community.

Throughout the process the projects structure and activities changed but the learning theory did not. When there were challenges in the project I found myself going deeper into research, using it as a guide to experiment my way out of situations that did not suit the project principles. Below I give a base of how the project started and some basics behind the learning theory used, before I dive into the practical elements of the study, weaving the learning theory throughout.

The initial idea for *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* came through a discussion with the artist Sari T.M. Kivinen. We wanted to apply for funding and Sari asked what kind of project I, as an artist, would like to produce? Up until now Sari and I had both worked on developing other artists' projects and events as part of Ptarmigan Ry¹, a mobile curatorial platform based in Helsinki. Although at times interesting, it was always the same type of audience that came to events. I wanted to work with the public in everyday spaces, opening art to a variety of people and audiences, celebrating particular realities of ordinary people and their everyday experiences.² Food would be used as a medium to gather and engage people in personal discussions about their lives and backgrounds. Sari had explored a variety of techniques regarding narrative and memory, both fictional and fact, in her practice and was interested in the story element. We begin with a small group to test our ideas.

Pedagogy (learning theories and teaching methods)

The main theoretical base used in developing the project's pedagogical aspects was the learning theory constructivism. This theory argues that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.³ Hence, generating knowledge and meaning is an interaction between an experience and an idea. Constructivism posits that learning is an active, constructive process. People actively construct or create their own subjective representations of objective reality, with new information being linked to prior knowledge.⁴ Knowledge is thus a product of humans and is socially and culturally constructed.

Social constructivism, strongly influenced by Vygotsky's 1978 work, suggests knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then appropriated by individuals.⁵ According to the theory, the process of sharing individual perspectives results in learners constructing understanding together that wouldn't be possible alone.⁶ McMahon agrees that learning is a social process and states that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities.⁷

We wanted the group to express their stories, memories, and experiences, and reflect on them in a new light. By encouraging them to ask questions, exploring and assessing what they knew, and make their own judgments on themselves, they would be able to see how they could be active creators of their own knowledge.⁸ As reality is constructed by our own activities, people together as members of a society could then invent the properties of the world.⁹ To explore and learn from people's subjective knowledge and stories would allow us to alter our individual views and thus influence our current society.

Sari and I did not want to be seen as teachers, but as participants and facilitators who would coach, mediate, and prompt the group, urging them to be actively involved with the project. Asking good questions and listening, acknowledging the uniqueness and complexity of each of the group, would help them to develop and assess their understanding and thereby their learning of other cultures.¹⁰

The theories behind 'connected knowledge', as put forth by Mary Field Belenky and her co-authors in *Womens Ways of Knowing* (1986), was an important element in the process of how we wanted people in the workshops to interact with each other. It is a conversational mode in which each interlocutor attempts to understand the other's social context from which they are speaking, working to identify with them. This understanding is facilitated by empathetic insight made available through a process of active listening. This leaves the participant open to the transformative experience of others, whilst retaining a sense of self for the experience to leave a lasting impression.¹¹

It is essentially defined by two interrelated elements:

1. Its intent to recognize the social context from which one speaks, judges, and acts according to their history and position relative to modes of social, political, and cultural power.¹²
2. To know and feel connectedness with others through empathetic identification. It is through empathy that we can literally redefine self, allowing us to think outside our own lived experience and establish a more compassionate relationship with others.¹³



FIGURE 5. Shopping for ingredients in the Asian market for a workshop, Helsinki, 2012.



FIGURE 6. (Opposite)
Workshop activity at Stoa, 2012

The first year

At the time Sari and I both lived in Eastern Helsinki, a relatively new area consisting of densely habited suburbs with buildings constructed in the 1960s or later. It is one of the areas with a somewhat concentrated number of people from different cultures. Approximately 10% of the district's population is of foreign origin (which is more than anywhere else in Helsinki), with around the same percentage having a mother tongue other than Finnish or Swedish.¹⁴ The project was to be based in our local area with the people we passed every day.

After receiving notice of some funding for the project we went to Stoa Cultural Centre in Itäkeskus. Stoa is a lively and varied cultural centre in East Helsinki run by the City of Helsinki's Cultural Office, situated by the Metro station in Itäkeskus, next to a large shopping centre.¹⁵ We spoke with the Cultural Producer who was interested in the project, giving us suggestions on where to find possible participants and a venue to hold the workshops.

PARTICIPANTS

Finding the participants was not easy. Being culturally considerate, we thought some woman would be more willing to participate if the group was exclusively female. Looking at statistics of Helsinki the Russian, Estonian and Somali communities were by far the largest minorities in Helsinki.¹⁶ To have a realistic representation of the population we would not invite artists, welcoming people from a variety of cultures with a mix of professions. This was far beyond the reach of two artists who had been living in Helsinki for two years. We realised, although we knew many people, we were very isolated within the art scene and our respective universities, not knowing many people outside of this artistic sphere.

Contacting various embassies and clubs, going to events and researching other food projects, an invitation was dispersed welcoming people to participate:

Do you like to cook? Would you like to meet new people and share experiences?

WELCOME TO THE GROUP: *Our Cuisine=Our Stories*

WHAT IS IT? A small club bringing together females living in East Helsinki (from various cultural backgrounds and a variety of ages) to cook, share recipes and stories related to food making, and experiences living in Helsinki. The aim is to share cultural diversity in a positive way to encourage joy in the local community.

Meeting for eight weekly sessions during April-May 2012. The final outcomes will be open to participants' friends and family to share the experiences.

Free participation with a homemade meal included.

From previous experience I have found although adults enjoy art, they are often not confident to take part in an art project. Many feel they do not know enough about art or cannot draw, so the experience is not for them. In the project description we purposely did not mention art, enticing participation through food and meeting new people. There were short biographies at the bottom mentioning we were artists and when speaking to people we introduced it as an art project.

A few people asked how much they would get paid for cooking a meal? Some only wanted to attend once, when they would cook and not for the other sessions. I found this very challenging as one of the main ideas of the project was about sharing and it seemed many people were not interested in this element. After a long discussion Sari and I decided because we had received funding for the project and wanted it to be as collaborative as possible, we would offer participants a decent monetary sum towards their personal grocery shopping. This did encourage some to participate and we slowly began to gather a small group.

PLACE

We were looking for a very specific place to hold the workshops. There needed to be a kitchen with cooking facilities along with a space for art activities and a table to eat together. We went and visited local community centres and also the Työväenopisto (Adult Education Centre), which had a fantastic kitchen and facilities that we could rent. There was one condition with renting the kitchen though - their needed to be a member of staff with us at all times that we would have to pay. We asked if the member of staff would participate as we felt it would be strange if someone were just observing while people expressed their past and present personal situations

and cultures. They said no, they would just be there to supervise so we decided this did not suit the project.

The cultural producer at Stoa sent us a message saying she had forgotten one of the workshop rooms they rent had a small kitchen attached. We went and saw the space and although there was an oven, sink and fridge, there were no cooking utensils. Due to the location and support Stoa offered in dispersing the project to their local audience, and cheap rental, we decided to use the space.

We booked seven weekly meetings, on Monday evenings from 17-20 throughout April and May, and began searching our cupboards at home and second hand markets gathering pots, pans, plates and all that we needed. Before the first session Sari and I went shopping to gather basic non-perishable food ingredients we would use over the project. We began visualising and planning how to best set the space for the interactions we hoped for.

Although this was to be a 'learning environment', its structure was not based on the traditional education paradigm. We re-designed the space to support and challenge the participants thinking, with a central area to gather, chat and do activities, based on a circle, so everyone could speak and be heard. Excess chairs and tables were stacked and put to the side giving an openness and airiness to the room, along with open windows to encourage air movement. All creative materials were placed on the tables so the group could take them when needed. These small changes made the space more alive and ready for action to take place.



FIGURE 7. Around the table at the first meeting in Stoa, Helsinki, 2012

WEEK ONE

In the first meeting nine women gathered (including the facilitators) in an upstairs room in Stoa that had a small kitchen. As we wanted the group to feel connected to each other, we rearranged the room to have four tables gathered in a circle with chairs placed around it. The table had various bowls with nibbles, water with lime slices and pencils and papers placed close at hand.

The group arrived, placed on nametags and were seated. I had a large bowl of nuts and slowly walked around the table offering them to each participant saying 'take as many as you want but don't eat them, yet'. I then said, for every nut, say one thing about yourself. After everyone had a good laugh at how many or little they each had we listened to what each wanted to share about herself.

Icebreaker activities are extremely important in my workshops. I use them in almost every session I have even if it is with a group I have been working with consistently for several months. It grounds the group in the physical space and with each other. It also gives the opportunity for each person to speak and express themselves without others speaking over them. Within groups there are always those who love to talk and then the more shy participants for whom it takes some time to feel comfortable in expressing themselves. It is important for the quieter people to feel they have a voice within the group and when they speak are heard.

This initial activity gave me a notion of people's openness with the information they chose to tell. Some talked more than their allocated 'nuts', of every place they had lived, why they are in Finland and justifying why they should be a part of the group. Others simply stated their favorite food and colour.

I then made Moroccan mint tea for all. I poured tea in small glasses in the traditional Moroccan way, speaking about the ritual that tea making, drinking and gathering holds within Moroccan culture. Telling about the way my grandfather had taught me to make the tea and how my grandmother needed to be the first to taste it seeing if it was suitable to be poured for all to drink. I also spoke about the ingredients individually and in particular how mint plays such an important role in the memories I keep of my family. The gatherings around the teapot during breakfast and in the afternoons, with the host continually filling your glass, paying attention it is always full. Passing around the mint, each smelled it speaking of their memories and associations.

Sari offered cookies alongside the tea. She showed a storyboard-like comic she had produced intertwining the recipe and cooking instructions with her memories of the first time she received the recipe and baked them.

These exercises were an example of what the participants would need to do in future sessions, i.e. to have an ingredient and investigate it in terms of personal memory and also in a simple offering of food or drink to the group.



FIGURE 8. Sari's cooking instructions and recipe in the form of a comic

We finished around the table with a simple Moroccan salad and pumpkin soup. Sari had wanted to make pumpkin soup and spoke of growing up on a farm and her mother making the soup from home grown pumpkins. It reminded her of hearty dinners with friends. She could not find pumpkins anywhere at that time of year in Finland so considered going to Estonia where she knew there were pumpkins at the market, finally she chose to substitute it with sweet potato and carrot.

Many of the group spoke of how they needed to substitute ingredients as availability of not only fresh produce but also the correct products were at times difficult to find in Finland. I enjoyed this idea of 'traditional' meals and childhood memories being re-interpreted according to what was available locally. The evolving and changing recipes, due to migration and movement, had essentially altered people's lifestyles making new memories concerning traditional recipes.

This first meeting was used as an introduction to each other and the project speaking of many practical elements. In the beginning we used an open idea of the project. We gathered people and materials, but it was up to the group as a whole how or if the project would be documented, what the outcomes would be and how they wanted to participate.

Both Sari and I were excited about what we would learn from the group along with what they would learn about our own cultures and lifestyles. In a constructivist view a characteristic of the role of the facilitator is that the instructor and the

learners are equally involved in learning from each other.¹⁷ This means the learning experience is both subjective and objective and requires that the instructor's culture, values and background become an essential part of the interplay between learners and tasks in the shaping of meaning.¹⁸ If we were not open with our own personal highs and lows, how could we expect the group to be open with theirs?

WEEK TWO

This week it was the participants' turn to prepare the food, speaking of their chosen ingredients and associated memories. The workshop outline was clearly divided into preparing the meal, activities and eating around the table. Pilvi, a Finnish participant, spoke about the fish soup she was about to prepare and how it brought memories of being in the kitchen watching her grandmother cook.

I went into the kitchen to help Pilvi prepare the meal while Sari sat with the group where they discussed which element of Pilvi's story they would personally develop. They decided on grandmothers and each person wrote a story, notes or drew about the connection they had with their grandmother and food.

Some people had not so fond memories:

Both of them were strange, no affection, no cooking time, complaining about life all the time.

I actually never felt close to them, detested going to their houses!

I was the "Ugly Duckling" growing up, then became the beautiful teenager they want me around.

Both gone, I do not miss them.

While I did not always get along with all my grandparents, they each played an extremely important role in my life and learning. I had seen them as filled with wisdom, grace and knowledge. But I now began to see how mental representations could be subjective with people viewing the role their grandparents played extremely differently.¹⁹ I was excited to see in what other ways the group's stories would challenge me throughout the project.

During the last hour we gathered around the table for some Finnish fish soup followed by dessert made by Pranuthi, from India. She prepared Nigerian plantain chips. When asked why Nigerian food she said she had never been there but currently had a Nigerian partner. The dessert she prepared opened her to discuss her relationship with her partner in Nigeria, who was having trouble with his papers and visa. Presenting this dish allowed Pranuthi to express a recent relationship situation and we were now aware of her cuisine choice. This is a good example to show the connection we can have with someone through a certain dish or food.

WEEK THREE

This week it was a Brazilian meal prepared by Flavia, with an Indonesian dessert by Evita. We were in for a treat!

Initially the project was to be based around mapping. We had a large piece of paper attached to the wall with a map of the world projected onto it, alongside a local map. In earlier weeks participants had drawn around the country they were from and pinpointed their current residence. We put the maps up every week for the group to add things, such as: people's shopping lists, drawings and stories. This would document the process of the project alongside the blog, however, nothing else was added to the maps thereafter.

In retrospect, although we had given examples, I don't think the group knew how to engage with such an activity. They were much more interested in discussing freely with each other. Sometimes the conversation was about their family situations, what they had been doing that week, and what they did for work; generally it was about food. They asked each other for cooking tips, each telling what they knew of the other's culture, cuisine and festivities. The group floated between the kitchen, where Flavia and Evita were preparing, and sitting around the table chatting. Flavia proudly gave an introduction whilst serving the meal:

The appetizer is cassava root. I cook it to make it soft and then I fry it, so inside is soft, outside is crunchy. This - I told you guys - is from the Indians so this is something from a really antique background and I think my mum says this is the first solid thing I ate ever in my life. So it brings childhood memories for me. Very good childhood memories.

After this session Sari and I decided to not plan activities for the next few weeks as people were not interested in taking part but wanted to chit-chat around the table. According to the constructivist theory you must provide learners with the opportunity to: a) interact with sensory data, and b) construct their own world.²⁰ The food was working all our senses so we decided to see what would happen if there was no project outline and we let the group construct the project meetings. They seemed to be learning from each other through conversation, so we considered the way they could learn rather than the activity to be taught. The project belonged to the whole group and we felt it was fair to trial how they seemed to want to meet (in a more free and open way, rather than with planned activities).

WEEK FOUR

This week we began, with the only activity we had planned, by asking the group:

What was a food experience you had during the week?

A sample of the text:

- Yesterday I was in a nephew's birthday party. My sister-in-law prepared many foods, in particular there was a great cake. The cake was very light; I don't know the name of it, but so, so light. The shape of the cake was a bear, as my nephew likes bears.

- We went to this Sami's birthday (he turned 30 years old) I decided to make birthday food for him as a gift. Spring rolls, crackers, and nasi goreng.

- On Vappu day we were in Kaivopuisto with some Nigerian and Finnish friends. We had Nigerian food, such as: Jollof (rice with tomato puree and lots of vegetables). They fry everything, kind of like Chinese fried rice.

After this short exercise we all wandered from the kitchen into the main area, speaking with each other. Sari opened the blog asking if people wanted to add things, showing what she had done from the previous weeks, and saying she could show them how it worked. No one seemed interested.

Evita had prepared a special Indonesian meal and we all gathered to look at the beautiful presentation. There were so many different smells and visually attractive elements on the table; we all wanted to know what the texture and taste of the dishes would be. They were delicious, but we did not get any oral stimulation in the form of stories, besides the fact that these meals were for celebratory occasions. She did not speak about her personal connection with the dishes. So although my stomach was very happy, my mind was still wondering what life was like in Indonesia? What were Evita's experiences there with her family? How had she learned to cook these meals? At what kind of events had she seen them?

Vygotsky also highlighted the convergence of the social and practical elements in learning by saying that the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge. Through practical activity a person constructs meaning on an intra-personal level, while speech connects this meaning with the interpersonal world shared by the person and her/his culture.²¹ The story element was very important to accompany the practical action of preparing, cooking and eating the food. The expression of personal stories is what assisted, not only the rest of the group to learn about another culture but the person speaking to understand more about themselves, their background and their personal thoughts associated with specific ingredients and dishes. Without the story the individual was not as engaged in the learning process we had put in place.

WEEK FIVE

Each week Sari and I spent a lot of time organising and meeting the cooks to shop for ingredients and materials, giving us a chance to meet participants on an individual basis. One went with the person preparing the meal while the other went with the person preparing dessert, learning where they shopped for their ingredients. We made sure pots and utensils were in the kitchen, bringing equipment from home and purchasing extra items the cooks needed.

This week Brishna (Afghanistan) brought to the meeting pre-prepared lamb shanks she had marinated and slowly cooked for the past 24 hours. They were still warm and filled the room with a hearty smell.

Raija from Holland prepared apple tarts for dessert. She mentioned she was not much of a cook and had made these tarts when she was seven, so they could not be

so difficult. She rolled out the dough, placed the mixture inside, closing them with little pinches around the edges. Placing them in the oven, she went back to prepare more. When she went to check the oven, they had begun to burn. Oh no!

Explaining the project initially, we spoke of how it was not just for people who were great cooks and about half the group were not very good at cooking, but tried. The other half really wanted to show off not only their culture's food but also their cooking and food presentation skills. I appreciated both but found the ones that took cooking seriously did not express their personal stories and connection to the food as much. They seemed used to expressing themselves not through voice but through the creative outlet of preparing and cooking food for others.

After the last two weeks Sari and I discussed our frustrations with the project. We both felt that although the group was discussing personal stories they were not being captured in any form. We decided the idea of having an open project did not work as we found nobody was thinking about anything but cooking. Rather than look at the project as being open and democratic we spoke about what we, not only as facilitators but also as artists, wanted out of the project. We discussed how there was not enough artistic activity and that the project had turned into a cooking club where the group could come to meet and eat. Bringing back the activities we would have them more focused on outcomes we wanted.

The language used when describing the project description now needed to be much clearer. According to Vigotsky, language and learning are inextricably intertwined and the language we use influences learning.²² We had two more meetings and now knew how to discuss the project and the outcomes we wanted.

WEEK SIX

In the sixth meeting Pranuthi was in the kitchen preparing the meal with Flavia baking dessert. We continued activities that had been started or spoken about previously, developing personal elements of the project.

Pushing the tables to the side, the floor was covered in paper with pencils, markers, scissors, coloured paper and glue. 'Express your personal food association' was written on the paper engaging the group to draw or visually present a story, food or experience, getting them active in the creative process by cutting, pasting and drawing.

We would produce a publication from the workshops and those finished moved on to designing their two pages. Gathered from previous workshops the base material was: a hand drawn map of their country, a map of where they currently lived, a story regarding their grandmother, a short food experience story, food likes and dislikes, and also the visual work they had just produced. Each person could see what they had done and collage them into two pages, choosing photographs from the workshops to be added the next week.

We, once again, gathered around the table and Sari asked everyone to stay standing and walk around the table, saying:

As you walk think about:

When you sit down at the table how do you place your body? How do you sit at the table? Where do you place your feet, your hands and your bottom? What is your posture like at the table? Do you normally sit at the same place or do you switch around? In which way do you speak?

Stop walking and take your seat at the table.

Everyone sat quietly waiting, but there was no discussion about the activity. You could see the group was more present and physically aware around the table by their movements. The activities I use in workshops are almost always about instigating some form of discussion or expression. This was a great exercise, using movement to become conscious of yourself in your body, without having to verbally express something about the experience.

Pranuthi had made a delicious shrimp curry which, she said, was a favorite of people coming from the coastal side of India. It was accompanied by coconut rice:

Coconut rice is my favorite food and we make it for many important occasions like birthdays or festivals. I learned the recipe from my grandmother and mother and today my family appreciate that I cook just like my grandmother. This brings back memories from childhood when I used to assist my mum, grandmother and even great grandmother in extracting coconut milk from freshly grated coconut, which gives the character aroma that can make you instantly hungry.

To cool down our taste buds after the spicy dish mango lassi (mango the pride fruit of India) was served. Flavia then shared her cassava root cake she which was surprisingly tasty. This was, by far, not only the most delicious tasting week but also the most productive in tangible project content.

WEEK SEVEN

The final meeting Siw prepared the meal while we began with the first activity. Each had an A4 piece of paper and a pencil. From left to right we each drew a line representing the highs and lows in our life. The pencil was not to be taken off the page until the line was complete.

A quiet ten minutes followed while people contemplated and visualised what their line would look like. Some traced an invisible line on the paper with their finger. Once the pencil touched the paper it was a slow process of moving it up, down and across thinking about your life chronologically. After we each had a line we began to discuss. Even though we had been meeting weekly for two months I still found it difficult to speak about what had happened in my life. It was not that I was hiding something from the group, but I had not taken the time to consciously reassess my life's ebbs and flows. I also sensed this feeling from the rest of the group.

For many the line seemed to be a migratory line representing where we had each lived and how we had felt in that place. It did, however, allow people to focus on the most important events and periods in their lives, speaking about them briefly. Sari expressed her line in words:

The biggest move in my life is represented by the lines that are most like walking up a staircase. This shows the steadily uphill period of moving to Finland. Steadily becoming into this place as a homeland & through this process becoming home within myself steadily within myself.

My name (surname) translates as 'rock'. A steady rock carrying home within myself.

The staircase lines show a steady ascension. The bottom shows a time of divorce, not only divorcing a man but divorcing a particular place, a situation, a time in my life when I didn't know how to find a steady home. I divorced the person I used to be. Walking up stairs. Stages of becoming. Stages of adaption. Walking up stairs to sit on a big warm rock.

Kallio. Kivi. Koti.

Rich smells began coming from the kitchen and a traditional Ethiopian meal was placed in front of us. Although Siw is a Swedish-speaking Finn she was married to an Ethiopian with whom she had two daughters. After her separation she spoke of keeping up the Ethiopian culture at home by cooking her favourite dishes. She cooked us the country's national dish: Dorat Wat on Injera bread.

The dish was a chicken stew with onions, carrots and potatoes served with eggs on top of the traditional Ethiopian bread. To eat it you take the bread from the bottom picking up the stew with it. When we first all looked at our plate someone said 'the chicken and the egg in the same dish'? Personally this was a very intense dish with many heavy ingredients. It was a nice finale to end with an African dish made by a Finnish person, showing that people's lives could be affected by the migration that came to them. They could learn and share with each other, adopting traditions and food to integrate into their own knowledge.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROJECT

During the seven meetings in 2012 nine women from diverse cultural and occupational backgrounds met weekly in East Helsinki over a two-month period. In the first year cross-cultural food experiences were explored, taking the form of a cooking club where the women prepared meals that reflected their culture. The process of food was important to everyone individually; the conversations were constant but they were fleeting and we could not completely document them. Through group discussion and creative exercises, and personal and collective narratives in association to food preparation, migration and Helsinki were explored. We all took a journey through each other's personal stories and different cultures.

The cultures represented were: Afghani, Australian, Brazilian, Dutch, Finnish, Indian, Indonesian, and Moroccan. Although we had searched for the largest minorities in Finland to be a part of the project, this did not happen. We also wanted

people from every continent. Although there was no one from sub Saharan Africa we actually had two dishes from there. Did we need to specifically search out these different cultures, or could we see their influence through others who had come into contact with them whilst in Finland?

We came to the conclusion that we were too generous with the participants. They received money for their time, a generous shopping budget for when they cooked, the chance to try different food and meet new people in a relaxed atmosphere. In future we would not offer participants compensation for their time.

Some took advantage of the open situation, i.e. with the shopping budget, and unused ingredients being taken home rather than left for following weeks. This would have been fine if people were more open, but trying to gather personal memories and stories was, at times, like drawing blood from a stone. They would give medicinal elements of the food or talk about what they had eaten that week, but we felt there was not any in-depth introspective taking place within the workshops. At times it was difficult to personally express myself; in future I need to be more open as it is essential in making the group feel comfortable. The issue of trust and openness greatly affects the participation of community members.

Experimenting with a democratic group ideally each member would take their own initiative, contributing in a way they felt comfortable. Letting them lead the project or stand back and learn from others would allow them to understand where their individual strengths and weaknesses lay. This project had purposely been left open so the group could mould it according to their individual learning, but this experiment did not work according to both emotional/mental growth of the group and tangible outcomes.

I learned through this process that the project's temporal structure needed to be balanced with clear guidance and parameters allowing for flexibility to be built into the learning process. Leaving an amount of flexibility for the group to express themselves, we were still the ones in control of the whole project. This change was difficult for me as ideally everyone had equal amount of control. Realising the group was not interested in any artistic outcomes; we needed to take more initiative over the project and what both Sari and I, as artists, wanted from it. From this experience I found openness needs a structure (and a leader) so things do get done.

A facilitator should structure the learning experience just enough to make sure that the students get clear guidance and parameters within which to achieve the learning objectives, yet the learning experience should be open and free enough to allow for the learners to discover, enjoy, interact and arrive at their own, socially verified version of truth.²³

This was a learning experience where I was able to test and experiment with ideas in a non-institutional setting, finding out what worked, what didn't, and what theoretical styles suited not only the project but also myself as a facilitator.

The second year

Our Cuisine = Our Stories workshops took place for the second year in Stoa Cultural Centre, Helsinki during 2013. The previous year's project was assessed and changes were made to the structure of both the project and workshops. Taking the successful elements and activities from the previous year we condensed them into two workshops rather than a longer series. We used the same space, but this year no cooking was involved on site, instead participants brought a pre-prepared sample to share with the group. Without cooking and its preparation, we had more time for discussion and producing project content to eventually share with the public.

Our Cuisine = Our Stories began by sending to, and personally giving, prospective participants a promotional flyer welcoming them to the group. The project was described on the flyer as:

A workshop that brings together people to discuss ingredients, prepare food and share stories. Using food as a means to understanding our individual stories and reflecting on the world through singular ingredients.

The aim is to share experiences and knowledge from various cultures to encourage communication within the local community, transgressing the boundaries between art and every day life.

This year we specifically reworked the project description clearly mentioning it was an art project using food and what participation would involve. We gathered a group from diverse cultural and occupational backgrounds to meet for two intensive five-hour workshops. The meetings took place at Stoa Cultural Centre in Itäkeskus in September. Stoa supported the project by advertising the call for participants in the local newspaper, their events catalogue, and on their website.

Initial interest in the project was good with 10 people from different parts of the world that resided in Helsinki, signing up for the workshops. On the day of the first workshop it was disappointing to find only 3 of the 10 attended. Gathering the participants is always a difficult task and this needed to be reassessed in order for the project to grow in the future.

This year the group was formed of both male and female participants of the following cultural backgrounds: American, Australian, Japanese, Finnish, Moroccan, and Swedish. The participant's occupational backgrounds included: school teacher, high school student, dancer, cultural producer, and artist.

In the workshops focus was placed on the creative activities and developing, remembering and expressing each other's stories rather than preparing food.

The session began with the icebreaker of taking grapes and expressing something about yourself for every grape that you took. Before the session each person was asked to choose one ingredient and make a snack from it to share with the group. When each arrived they were eager to show the others what they had



FIGURE 9. Collaboratively preparing pumpkin pies to exchange with the public, Helsinki, 2013



brought, but their tasty treat needed to stay a secret.

The group was blindfolded and one at a time they placed their snack in front of each person. We could then touch, smell and taste the food in front of us trying to guess the ingredient and spoke of the memories that arose through our senses (excluding sight). One participant's ingredient was an apple; she brought apple juice. It was simple but very confusing for the rest of the group, from the smell and taste they were sure it was red grape juice or a special berry mixture. It was a shock when blindfolds were taken off; everyone was sure someone would not simply bring apple juice, it was just not interesting enough; this was the beauty of it. Each person spoke about their ingredient, what it meant to them, and their personal stories and memories associated with it.

After this exercise each participant wrote a personal story regarding their ingredient; some also chose to draw the ingredient. One such story was:

Miso for me is a truly comforting memory. Holding my hands around a bowl, and slurping is recommended. When I was young I went to a fairly country school so I felt embarrassed about my culture. My Japanese grandmother told me often about the time when she came and picked me up from school and how embarrassed I was. I was embarrassed about bringing rice to school and wanted sandwiches like everyone else but behind closed doors I was able to comfortably use my chopsticks, eat mountains of rice and, of course, slurp my miso soup.

As seen in this example, food was used as a mediator to engage people to speak about their life experiences and share their stories. Initially, we thought it would take a number of weeks to build trust in expressing their personal stories and were worried that having only two sessions with the group would not allow for an openness and sharing to happen. We were wrong!

After lunch we had planned to get more into food politics, exploring the ingredients by asking simple questions: Who eats it? What is it? When (at what time of year is it available or as a part of what celebrations)? Where in the world did it originate? Why it is eaten (health, taste, locality)? How is it prepared?

We briefly scanned these areas but the group was tired and not able to concentrate, so we decided to return to them in the next session. It is important to see what stage the group is at energy wise as there is no point in continuing with the session plan when people are too exhausted to engage. This often means a change of plan with a different exercise or a physical activity.

In the moment we did another activity we had done the previous year. Participants had an A4 piece of paper and a pencil. From left to right they needed to draw a line representing their life with their highs and lows.

When I had previously done this activity, I have to admit, my line represented my travels, where I had lived and how I had felt in those places. This year I wanted to be more open, I had recently had a baby and my line focused around this. Others spoke of being depressed and on medication or the break up of a relationship. For many of the group the final part of the line was in the middle, a neutral part of life.

This exercise gave the group time to reflect on their lives, focusing on the most important elements and discussing these briefly with the group. They had a new understanding of each other and the learning experience became a shared enterprise. The emotions and life contexts of those involved in the learning process were an integral part of a mutual learning.

We planned to meet again but two of the group could not make it. We decided then to meet informally at one of our houses with the three remaining participants. Nothing was planned for this meeting besides cooking small pumpkin pies with Katri, originally from America. This was a nice and homely way to meet, freely discuss and document a collaborative cooking venture. The pumpkin pies would be used for the next day's *taste exchange* where we would be engaging the general public with tastes and stories of the project (see chapter 4).

REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROJECT

We had changed the project description placing an emphasis on art and activities revolving around sharing personal stories, not cooking. A couple of the group took great pride in presenting their home cooked ingredients; with others being there because it was an art project, but all understood it was not a cooking club. It made it much easier to facilitate when the project description was clear and the participants were aware of concepts of art and engagement.

In the end, all the participants we had either previously met or were a friend of a friend. This made them less suspicious of the project and trust building happened quickly allowing people to be open about their life experiences.

As facilitator I felt five people was just not enough; as a participant I felt more comfortable within the group. I did not need to listen to ten people expressing their stories but could concentrate on just four, giving them more attention and asking questions. Listening more deeply to each person's stories allowed me to become emotionally involved and I found myself being sympathetic or joyful, sharing the speakers own emotions of their experience.

In the beginning of the project I thought the workshops could never be turned into a one two-hour session and result in outcomes we were looking for. I now started to feel that by narrowing down the most successful activities this could be a possibility for future workshops. It did not need to be a series of meetings but could be a shorter and more intense experience of getting to know each other and knowledge exchange between cultures.

The third year

Our Cuisine = Our Stories was realised for the third year in Helsinki, in Hämeenlinna and made its first international appearance in Rabat, Morocco. This year I wanted to collaborate with other projects and organisations enabling the project to become known in different communities and lightening the administrative and organisational load. In 2014 I solely facilitated the project; Sari and I jointly documented the Helsinki workshops making a video and developing the website.

HÄMEENLINNA

Our Cuisine = Our Stories began the year by collaborating with the Maku Project. The Maku Project was a one year socially engaged art migration project based on non-formal learning through the arts to help integrate immigrants into Finnish culture.²⁴ As part of the project *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* ran two three-hour workshops in Verkatehdas, Opistotalo, Hämeenlinna with two separate groups. Verkatehdas is an old factory located in the centre of Hämeenlinna. It has been renovated into a unique complex, consisting of a music and congress hall, conference center, restaurant, gallery, and adult education centre.²⁵ An installation of the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* project and outcomes from the workshops were part of the MAKU-Projektin loppunäyttely, at Galleria Kone (situated within Verkatehdas) from 15.7 to 29.7. A *Taste Exchange* event was part of the opening night, collecting people's stories, chatting about food, the project and life in Finland. The exhibition and *taste exchange* will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

PLACE

The workshop space was a typical classroom with a board at the front and tables gathered in two separate places for students. The largest area had eight tables gathered together and could fit up to twenty people. I set up the materials placing a large piece of fabric as a tablecloth at one end, dividing the pencils, papers, scissors, etc. around the tables. Although I have worked with larger groups in classroom settings this was a first for the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* project and I wondered if it would work in a setting such as this.

PARTICIPANTS

Unsure of group sizes and language skills, I made the workshop outline simple. The groups were large with almost 30 people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Most participants had been in Finland for under a year and did not speak English with basic Finnish, communication was a mix of Finnish, English and Arabic. I requested they each bring an ingredient or item of food from their culture, but was not sure if they would bring anything so was prepared with my own ingredient and also the producer of the project (Edwina Goldstone) had hers.



FIGURE 10. Secret food activity, Horisontti workshops, Helsinki, 2014

SESSION ONE

The first group arrived excited to show the others what they had brought. And although told to hide their food many could not wait, leaving Polish apples and Afghani pomegranates on the table for all to see.

Once the first group was seated I began moving around the tables offering nuts. Each person spoke about themselves (in Finnish) according to the amount of nuts they had taken. One of the participants had taken more than ten nuts. It was his turn to speak and the whole room turned to look and listen. He was very shy and it seemed the class did not know much about his personal background. He spoke quietly about his children, their names and ages and the group seemed surprised at the information he was putting forward. I could tell he was embarrassed but could also sense he felt empowered the whole room was paying attention to him.

We moved onto the blindfolded exercise where each could take out the food they had brought. There were three Iranian participants who did not want to participate saying that it was for religious beliefs. When I asked what religion they were they said Muslim. I reassured them that it would be asked if each item had any meat in it and then they would not need to taste it. They were still worried but finally agreed, putting on the blindfolds. As the food went around, the group was excited by new tastes, smells and textures, along with more familiar flavours. One of the Thai women had made a rice dessert with an egg topping, an Iranian participant spat it out when he tasted it and refused to participate from then on. Some of the other participants were not placing their blindfolds on securely and although frustrated I knew it was up to them how involved they wanted to be.

We moved onto expressing a personal story through drawing and writing about the one ingredient that each had brought; I encouraged those to make a start that were finding the task difficult. From past experience I had seen different styles of working: there are those who dive straight in and others who need to contemplate the task. Although I appreciate a variety of ways to work, the contemplators often begin producing something when there is little time left and do not finish their work. This becomes difficult in a workshop when there is only an allocated amount of time. These participants do not get the feeling of accomplishment as they have half a perfectly drawn image or written story rather than an average completed version. Beauty lies in the individuals handwriting and drawing not in an immaculately drawn and written piece. At the end each person showed the rest of the group what they had done, reading their story or explaining their picture.

SESSION TWO

After a lunch break the second group came in saying they had been preparing their dish all morning. I went through the nut exercise and then we quickly moved onto the blindfolded tasting. There was tiramisu and Indian treats made by one of the participant's wives, freshly baked dark bread and Thai sweets made in the shape of fruit. A lot of effort had been put in. There was a Russian woman who refused

to take part in the workshop and did not want to be blindfolded or taste anything. After my experience that morning I encouraged her to take part but she refused so I let her be, as long as she did not disturb the other participants.

This group was much more lively and loved showing their classmates something from their country and how delicious it was. Even if it was just a simple apple they were all very proud. While they tasted the food the group called out their memories, flavours and ingredients they thought of, in Finnish. This helped them to develop their vocabulary, learning new words using all of their senses, a different way of learning the language that is achieved by collaboration and actively doing.²⁶

After filling our bellies they began drawing and writing their stories about their ingredient. I am not interested in people's names, ages, country of origin and professions being attached to the stories. Anonymity can make you feel more connected to the person writing them as they could be your neighbor, a friend, or even one of your family members. Once there is an identity, you can automatically distance yourself thinking I am not like them.

Once again the work was shared and, although simple, charming.

SHORT REFLECTION

In the past gathering participants has been difficult, slipping into a project with ready-formed groups allowed me to concentrate on project content and not administrative duties. Previously I had placed much importance on being part of the group, but due to the setting and large number of participants I was a facilitator and not a mutual participant. Although some did not want to participate, overall I felt the workshops were successful. Many of the group was excited to share something they felt close to from their own culture whilst also experiencing new and strange flavours from their fellow classmates.

Communication was difficult due to the group's language skills and large number. Instead of writing a story many drew pictures and diagrams enabling everyone in the class to understand. Although communication is important I have found art can be a form of communication that transgresses language, allowing people from many cultures to understand through images. I would like to further explore the use of images between different cultures within the project.





FIGURE 11. Central table for the first workshop at Horisontti, Helsinki, 2014

HELSINKI

For the first time *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* was not based in Eastern Helsinki but took a trip to the North. In October workshops took place in Malminkartano in collaboration with Horisontti, a resident run community centre that has been described as *the living room of the local residents*.²⁷ Horisontti was founded in 1993 and was initially an association for the unemployed. Since 2004 it has been open as a non-governmental organisation that promotes the well being and inclusion of local residents. Their aim is to share knowledge and caring, and to experience the joy of doing things together. Although I did not know the area I was very excited to work with Horisontti; their way of working was rare in Finland. Most of the community centres in Finland are government run. This means there were usually many meetings and emails exchanged to organise a project, with numerous staff members involved in order to have the information dispersed among the local audience. In Horisontti the space was open to being used, as it could change at anytime according to the local residents' needs. A couple of staff members (volunteers) were spearheading the centre and were happy for the space to be activated.

PLACE

Horisontti is a large space with a small kitchen at the back. The majority of the space is currently used as a secondhand market, selling items the local community has donated. Although generating income for the centre one of the directors expressed frustration that it had taken over and there was just more and more stuff coming in all the time. At the front of the centre near the entrance was a corner with couches. Next to this were five or six tables with chairs for people to sit and enjoy a homemade bun and coffee from the cafe. There were a couple of computers tucked away in the corner that always had locals sitting at them. In a back corner were weaving looms and a sewing machine.

The 'living room area' with couches was used for the first session as we could comfortably gather round a central table, which I set up by borrowing items from the secondhand shop.

PARTICIPANTS

Both Horisontti and I promoted the project in order to gather participants. It was important for Horisontti to be on board with the project as they knew the area and could invite locals. In the past we had specifically not wanted to work with certain professions and genders but this year I was open to anyone being a part of the project. No editorial changes were made to the call from the previous year. I made a Facebook event and sent invitations to past participants and friends.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

There were three sessions, each two hours long, on Saturday afternoons. They were strictly divided into the following areas:

WEEK ONE – Introduction to each other, food ingredients and the project.

WEEK TWO – Sharing food and developing stories. Begin shooting video.

WEEK THREE – Complete filming video and translate stories.

I used some activities from previous workshops but also trialed new ones.

WEEK ONE

In the first session sixteen Helsinki residents took part, with cultural backgrounds from: Syria, the Philippines, South Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, India, Russia, Finland, Spain, Australia, and Morocco. A quarter of the participants were Finnish and about the same percentage were artists. It was great to see such a large turn out and people from so many different regions of the world.

The session, once again, began with handing out grapes, many of the group refused to take some, saying they were not hungry. There now needed to be an other introductory icebreaker. In pairs with the person next to them they had two minutes each to speak about themselves. From the information gathered they then needed to introduce the other person to the group. This icebreaker, although short, concentrates on talking, listening and memory. All participants need to tell something about themselves but also need to listen and purposely remember information about the other person.

I then asked them the question: If you were a food ingredient what would you be? We would be returning to it later.

I had prepared Chinese take away boxes with basic ingredients in them: milk, flour, honey, salt, cardamom and ginger. In pairs one person opened the box and exposed their partner to the ingredient using smell and touch. After the ingredient was guessed the box was put back and another was taken for the other partner. The idea of this exercise, as well as investigating food in a new way using a limited number of senses, was to get the group to work with someone they did not know.

The tactile experience with food has been at the base of my eating habits from a young age. Touching food and eating with your hands requires you to pay attention to what you are eating, essentially having more connection with what you eat. It is becoming less common that we touch food, and this exercise encouraged everyone to become more connected with food through touch.

I had given them prior warning about the exercise: 'If you were a food ingredient what would you be?' I was hoping this pre warning would allow them to spend more time drawing and writing than contemplating about which ingredient to choose. A South Korean, Finn, and Pilipino all chose to be a chili. Others chose: peach, lemon, garlic, onion, cardamom, turmeric and an egg. In this exercise

people talked about their personal qualities indirectly through an ingredient, with the ingredient chosen saying a lot about their personality.

We then had a tea break with freshly baked pulla straight from the community centre's oven. I introduced the project's history, what had been done previously and what I hoped to happen in these sessions. The group was interested to find out what NGO I was a part of and how the project was funded? Many could not understand that it was an art project; where was the art? A couple of the artists seemed genuinely confused. There must be some organisation behind it? I tried to best describe the notion of socially engaged art and what I felt my role as an artist in this world was: not to necessarily make tangible objects but to make the world a better place. They seemed half satisfied with my answers but still confused; this way of working did not fit into their previously constructed knowledge.

What happens when someone gets a new piece of information? The constructivist model says that the student compares the information to the knowledge and understanding he/she already has.²⁸ I realised members of the group were going through the process of accommodation. Accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences.²⁹ A way of working they had not been aware of had been placed before them; they now needed to accommodate this new mode of working into their own knowledge base.

WEEK TWO

The previous week Jaana (one of the directors) had shown me a more private area where the workshops could take place. The only problem, it was filled with unsorted secondhand items. She had spent all week reorganising so it was clear with four tables placed in the centre and chairs neatly tucked underneath. It looked like a long dining table; it was perfect. The group could now feel much safer in this private space to express themselves and the workshop had a more formal food element. I found some large tablecloths, plates and cutlery and prepared the dinner table for the workshop. The group were to bring one ingredient and something made with it to share.

After a quick introduction to the session we began with the blindfolded activity. There were only eight people present as many from the week before were unable to attend. From a plantain stew to sauerkraut, coconut rice to a green smoothie, blueberry pie, and little date and coconut treats, they all had such distinct flavors.

When tasting the sauerkraut I was surprised that many people enjoyed it. Kari, a Finnish participant, said he would never have tried it if he was not blindfolded, but actually liked it and asked where he could get some. Motaz, a Syrian man, spoke of how the taste reminded him of the market place in his hometown. Another participant was surprised that these flavours existed in the Middle East as she had never associated fermented food with that area.

Salla, a Finnish participant, spoke about her blueberry pie and recalled fond

memories of going through the forest with her grandmother collecting berries. After tasting each other's cultures the group began to write stories and memories of the ingredient they had chosen; this would be filmed for a short video. Sari had set up a mini studio in the waiting room of the toilet (as it was the most private space, with the best lighting and a white background).

When the group had completed their story they went into the studio to be filmed, holding their ingredient in front of their face and telling their memories. I did not want people's faces to be visible as there are automatic assumptions made on whom they are, where they are from, how old they are, etc. I wanted the story and the food to be the most important element with only glimpses of the person's hand or hair. Although we were exploring each other's identities, I was not interested in the physical attributes of the people. A few videos were shot and we planned to meet the next week to complete them.

WEEK THREE

This week we meet casually shooting the videos and translating the texts. Each person's stories would be in their native tongue allowing richness which is often lost when expressed in a language other than their own. They would be translated and later edited with English subtitles.

SHORT REFLECTION

These workshops focused on creative activities using food as a mediator for people to remember and share their life experiences and stories. There were a variety of participants, each one bringing different cultural knowledge to share making it a learning experience for all.

I enjoyed working in a grassroots atmosphere that is open to change according to the local resident's wants and needs, which is rare in Finland. It was also liberating to work in a space that could be physically changed and used in a way that would most benefit the project. Horisontti actually had contact with local residents using the space that were interested in participating in what was happening there. *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* will definitely continue working with them in the future.

Sari purely documenting the process and producing the stories into the video: 'Malminkartano Tales' was extremely helpful. Instead of us each having the same facilitator/organiser role, she took on the role of documenter allowing images and video to be produced from the experience. It is impossible to document and facilitate at the same time and it worked well when each person concentrated on her own role. I realised that in future different people would need to take on different roles to expand the project's outcomes.



MOROCCO

In October 2014 *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* presented its first international project *3teni l'khobz (Give Me the Bread)* in Morocco. It was two two-hour workshops over two afternoons. The outcomes were turned into a photographic installation as part of the exhibition: 'Public Space', at Kulte Gallery & Editions in Rabat. The exhibition and installation are discussed in chapter 4.

As the project had been purely Finnish based I was interested to see if, and how, it could be adapted to another country. Although Morocco is not a very multicultural country (with Arab-Berber being 99% of the population)³⁰ it has experienced massive immigration over the last few years, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa. However, this is not enough to call it multicultural.³¹

In the past *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* had been successful as there were a variety of ingredients explored from many different cultures. This was not going to work in Morocco. Instead of looking at individual ingredients I decided to investigate bread. In Morocco bread is seen to be sacred. It is never thrown away but carefully collected. It is eaten with breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner. In fact, a meal without it is not a meal. It is used as a spoon and a fork, and is the first food put into a baby's hand. I was interested in investigating the myths and stories behind this sacred food, and the role it plays in Morocco and in its people's lives.

The gallery director was excited to have a socially engaged project such as *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* as part of her exhibition. There are no other contemporary Moroccan artists working in this way; they are still very object based, interested in their own art career and the art scene. Moroccan artists do not produce workshops as part of their practice so it was important for me to have a strong pedagogical base along with interesting outcomes in order to influence other artists and their notions of what art can be in Morocco.

PLACE

As I was collaborating with the gallery and outcomes would be part of an exhibition there, it seemed natural to have the workshops in the gallery space. The gallery was easily accessible just off the main street and around the corner from Morocco's first and newly opened Contemporary Art Museum. The gallery was small, but light and had a terrace with a nice long table. I set the table with Chinese take-away boxes filled with various basic ingredients, placing papers and pencils close by.

FIGURE 12. Detail of workshop in progress, Rabat, 2014

PARTICIPANTS

In earlier discussions with the gallery director she insisted it was her role to find the workshop participants. I mentioned it could be difficult to find participants, sending her a description of the project with an invite letter to disperse. A week before going to Morocco I asked if many people were interested, she said yes a few artists had signed up. I was worried there would only be artists and began searching for different women's groups and associations based in Rabat, sending emails inviting them. A woman from the American International Women's Association of Rabat replied with interest saying she would forward the welcome letter.

FIRST SESSION

In the first session there were seven locals from a variety of professions and ages. There were: artists, a dentist, an events planner, a philosopher, a gallery director, a bakery owner, and an electrician. I began with the grape exercise, offering each a large plate of grapes, acknowledging them personally and welcoming them to the group. This begins a connection where trust and respect can develop.

Forming pairs each took a box, allowing the other to smell and touch the item guessing the ingredient. The ingredients in the boxes were all used for preparing bread: flour, semolina, salt, yeast, fennel, an egg, milk, olive oil, and sugar.

From these basic ingredients activating all our senses, we got to know each other by discussing our personal stories related to bread. This was a free-flowing conversation; the group had already come with many stories and ideas about what they could speak about regarding bread. Most people absolutely loved bread in any form; a few did not eat it at all. One person owned a bakery and spoke about how this came about; others spoke of their tastiest bread experience, and an oven in the north that could bake bread as large as the table at which we were seated.

I introduced the project through the publication and spoke of previous events and workshops. The group were interested in what type of work I did as an artist, and if objects were not the centre of my practice then how did I make money? We began a discussion about my artistic practice and the importance of empowering others to communicate and make changes in their world. I spoke of how I had gained support from communities for my work, and had at times received government funding. They were very interested in the idea that an artist did not just work with galleries but was active in other areas of society.

SECOND SESSION

I had asked the group to bring some bread to share, and also some they could be photographed with. Five people came. It was difficult to hide the bread from the rest of the group, but they were blindfolded as each person's bread was placed in front of the other. One participant gently ran their fingers along the bread while intimately describing every bump, crevice and the overall shape of the bread. This was a very sensual and tactile experience. Although touch and smell were used in

previous blindfolded sessions, the main sense used was taste, so it was fascinating to see someone describe bread as an object.

Stories were told about the specific type of bread each person brought. As they began writing, I took individual members of the group aside to photograph. Before arriving in Morocco I had taken a photo of my partner, to use in the catalogue, with a large round rye bread with a small hole in the middle covering his face. The group had seen this image as it had been used as exhibition promotion and on the invitation. They knew and had seen that I wanted the bread covering their faces. The women of the group found this difficult, placing the bread above their head, on their ears, or peeking over the top to see the camera. They were not comfortable in front of the camera or with what I had requested, so the images I wanted to make were a challenge. The men seemed quite comfortable in front of the camera and the sessions with them were quick and easy. After photographing the entire group we sat down to discuss our stories. One participant told, in French:

Lou and the half baguette in Paris.

My first year in France was about grief. My father had just died in Morocco, and I left just after for my studies in Paris.

You have to know that in Paris, if you leave bread one day outdoors it becomes impossible to eat. It becomes hard. I was living alone, so each day, I bought a baguette and threw half away. One day I realised that the French buy half a baguette, so I did the same and came back home crying and called my mother because I was really upset. "I want to come home", I said, and after I realised that I was just sad because of loneliness. So for me bread is a thing to share. Its home, my home, my family. After a few years I came back to Morocco to share bread with my family.

I had only just met this woman but the story she wrote was sad, loving and exposing. She later mentioned her excitement at being a part of these workshops, and they had inspired her to begin taking up creative writing again.

SHORT REFLECTION

As I was in Morocco only ten days before the exhibition it was difficult to gather people interested in participating in the project. Although we achieved a good mix of genders and professions, I would have liked to involve people from the Moroccan working class and below the poverty line. The space had a lot to do with this. With more time I would have chosen a space that was communal and neutral for the group to meet, allowing for people from different classes to attend.

There is a very specific class system revolving around art and galleries in Morocco. Everyday people would never go into a gallery unless they were working there, so it would be extremely difficult to get them to participate in a project in a space like this.

Generally, the group struggled with writing or drawing a story, and some did not do it at all. Most of those who did wrote spoke of what they had for breakfast or positive and happy comments about bread. Although it was very easy for the group

to discuss personal stories, it was difficult to get them to express these in drawing and writing. In retrospect, I see how more time could have been spent in this area with examples given and a pre-exercise to the story writing. It was encouraging to receive comments and feedback from the participants, saying they felt inspired to be more open with the people they pass by every day.

REFLECTIONS ON THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PROJECT

In the third year *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* workshops took a variety of forms with three different groups gathering from various cultures, professions, and ages. In Hämeenlinna, as part of their integration, large groups of newly arrived migrants took part in two one-off workshops. Helsinki saw a newly formed group of locals meeting three times. In Morocco it was workshops over two days with participants who were familiar with the gallery.

Narratives were organically explored in association to food ingredients, the social context the participants lived in, and their everyday lives. This happened through intimate group work and the sharing of experiences, instigated by creative exercises.

In 2014 the project was developed in association with other organisations, giving it more visibility. A strong and realistic working practice began to develop in collaboration with other spaces and projects. These interactions taught me the effectiveness of collaboration, allowing the project to expand in new ways, developing networks and new experiences. These collaborations boosted and supported the project's ideas of inclusion and knowledge sharing.

Overall reflections

Our Cuisine = Our Stories initial aim was to investigate possible modes of integration in a culturally diverse Finland, using creative forms. Food was an extremely important mediator allowing people from a variety of ages, professions and cultural backgrounds to gather and collaborate. Intimate group work using ingredients, tastes, and stories, gave each participant an insight into a different culture and life-style within their own community. Each year the way of working changed, building and developing on the previous year's experience.

As a result of the workshops, a temporary learning network was developed and left to organically grow or decrease. I was not interested in building a sustainable community of people that consistently met and gathered around a physical or virtual space. I was interested in having brief and intense encounters with people and then putting to use knowledge we had learned from each other, in society and our own environments. Members of this sporadic community could assess their social

and cultural values and these could be transferred to each other taking everyone on a journey through each other's personal stories. By trying to describe their life experiences the participants were able to establish a distance from this experience and situate it within a parallel world in which reflexive examination could more easily happen.³²

As a socially engaged artist I needed to take on many roles, from facilitator to artist to participant. I felt I needed to take on all roles in the project to truly understand what was involved - from sharing my life experiences and stories, to devising the workshops and learning theories behind them, to creatively producing project content. Retrospectively I see areas where it would make sense to collaborate with others who have more experience and knowledge in the area, i.e. in producing a social service based around the case study. After discussing with many of the participants I came to the conclusion that I am producing an experience but not necessarily an ART experience. From the experiences artistic elements emerge.

The *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* workshops have been a huge learning journey for me, not only as an artist but also on a personal level. I have, at times, uncomfortably had to realise things about my own knowledge and myself that were limiting both the project and my life. My identity was enriched and expanded through this collaborative interaction, as were my collaborator's. I realised the extent to which we allow our experiences to touch us and reconfigure our interactions, varies greatly from person to person.³³

Having such great experiences in the workshops, giving meaning to other's and my own life experiences, I would like to further investigate ways in which these gathering and sharing elements could take place without my presence. This would allow for a much larger number of people to possibly engage in the project and reflect on their community and the way they live. The workshops are now at the stage where the content and way of working needs to be made more public.

In the next chapter I explore how the project can connect to the general public, seeing how these ideas can be implemented on a larger scale and for a broader audience.



deux et la troupelette m'embrasse
 "You pere est mort en 1997 telle année de
 je suis allé vivre à PARIS pour mes études.
 Ce qui fait savoir c'est qu'à PARIS, on
 nous donne une troupelette de nos études
 de nous dire et nous faire que nous sommes
 Comme je vivais seul, chaque jour je faisais
 une troupelette de nos études. Je savais que
 les français achètent une troupelette
 Mais, je faisais aussi et je ne me dégage
 avec en l'honneur. J'appelle ma mère et
 y lui dit "JE VOUS REMERCE A LA
 MAISON". "Bon soir, je ne puis pas
 pas pour le pain, mais pour de l'activité
 pour moi, le pain, c'est le postulat, c'est
 la nation, ma nation, ma famille. Mais
 je suis coûteux."





SMALL, DARK, ^{CRUNCHY} ~~ROSE~~ ^{CRISPY} ~~CRISP~~, RYE
BREAD -
REMINDS ME OF MY GRANDMOTHER
SHE WAS THE BREAD OF MY
EYE
SHE WENT WELL WITH ALL
MEALS, WAS A LITTLE ^{HARD} ~~SOFT~~
ON THE OUTSIDE BUT SOFTER
SOFT INSIDE
WHEN I DIDN'T SEE HER
FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS, I
MISSED HER AND HAD
WITHDRAWALS.
MY GRANDMOTHER IS NO LONGER
ALIVE
AND I NO LONGER EAT BREAD



FIGURE 13. *3teni l'khobz (Give Me the Bread)* Installation
Public Space exhibition at Kulte Gallery & Editions,
Rabat, 2014



Chapter 4:

Intervention, Interaction and Exchange

This chapter presents the public outcomes from the case study: *Our Cuisine = Our Stories*, that took place from 2013–2015 using material produced from the workshops discussed in the previous chapter. It begins with a theoretical framework regarding conversation and dialogical aesthetics with examples provided of similar socially engaged art projects that have used food and exchange in the public arena. I then introduce *Taste Exchange* – a series of public interventions produced by *Our Cuisine = Our Stories*, which shared knowledge and stories between cultures. Artistic representations of the project – a publication, exhibitions, and online, are presented observing how the project interacted with the general public. It ends with reflections on the chapter and the project outcomes. The following overviews are not intended to be comprehensive, but are instead used to illustrate basic theoretical foundations and an account of what happened in the case study.

Theoretical background

Conversation is often understood as an equal, rational, democratic exchange that builds bridges and communities allowing people to recognise and understand each other.¹ It can take many forms and to work with exchange can mark one's tolerance of diversity, redefining not only the *Other*, but the individual as well.²

Art that is grounded in the realisation of our interconnectedness – the intertwining of self and others, is based on an unconventional model of artistic production: collaborative rather than individual, and dialogical rather than monological. The work cannot be fully realized through monologue: it can only come into its own in dialogue, as open conversation.³ The curator Irit Rogoff recognises that *the notion of conversation... has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade.*⁴

When speaking of conversation, listening must also be recognised as active, productive and as complex as speaking, and has an imperative role in the creative process.⁵ As Grant Kester expresses regarding dialogical aesthetics, artists working in the area of conversation begin their work with a desire to listen. Kester suggests a very different image of the artist, one defined in terms of openness, of listening, and of a willingness to accept a position of dependence and vulnerability with the collaborator. Artistic identity is then based on speaking as well as listening, with the most important element being insights derived from interactions with others and otherness.⁶

But the artistic work includes more than just the conversation that takes place between practitioners and their co-participants. It also encompasses the broader discursive context within which a project operates, i.e. relevant public policies and debates, images and narratives promulgated by the mass media and other political and cultural sites, which the work is capable of producing and transforming.⁷

The conversation has changed since the early 1990s taking a new turn when artistic practice began focusing on the sphere of inter-human relations. The viewer's interaction was now integral to the work with the artist involved in the relations he created among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability.⁸

The changing aesthetics

In a conventional aesthetic experience the subject participates in dialogue through an individual and physical experience of liking, usually the formal conditions of an object. In a dialogical or relational aesthetic an exchange in discourse forms the aesthetic and is intended to model subjectivity.⁹

This move towards a deaestheticisation and dematerialisation saw the importance of visual pleasure in artworks take a back seat to antivisual or immaterial strategies. The work has become a process with unfixed permanence to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation.¹⁰ Meetings, encounters, events, and various types of collaboration between people and places of conviviality represent aesthetic objects.¹¹ Rather than an object, art can now be understood as an event intended to produce a transformation in the viewer's consciousness of the world.¹²

These current forms of art involve methods of social exchanges often being inspired by social issues. They routinely engage the collaborative participation of other non-artists and are seen as a means to strengthen art's capacity to penetrate sociopolitical organisation of contemporary life, linking individuals and groups together with greater impact and meaning.¹³ An art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interaction and its social context can challenge conventional perceptions and systems of knowledge.¹⁴

Dialogical aesthetics

Grant Kester's concept of a dialogical aesthetic sought to intertwine an aesthetic with the political and the ethical. Its distinct characteristics being:

- A commitment to duration.
- A collaborative process to generate new insight and new forms of knowledge.
- A deliberate effort to problematise artistic and creative agency.¹⁵

The artworks unfold through a process of interaction in a process of open-ended dialogical exchange that defines dialogue itself as fundamentally aesthetic and in itself the 'work' or art.¹⁶

The work requires us to locate the moment of open-ended possibility in the process of communication that the artwork catalyses, requiring two important shifts:

1. A more definitive account of communicative experiences that is sensitive to the identities of speaking subjects based on reciprocal openness.
2. An understanding that the work of art is a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object.¹⁷

It is an active process that can help to speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse and political conflict.¹⁸ It requires a reciprocal openness to accept transformative effects of difference from the artist and his collaborators.¹⁹ This empathic identification is necessary in a dialogical art practice as it provides a way to decentre a fixed identity through interactions with others.²⁰ This aesthetic has the ability to comprehend and represent complex social and environmental systems by identifying often unseen connections. In this sense dialogical practices can expand the notion of what art can be.

Dialogical artists define themselves through their ability to catalyse understanding, mediate exchange and sustain a process of empathetic identification and critical analysis.²¹ They are concerned with achieving insights through dialogical and collaborative encounters with others, in order to open the cultural and politi-

cal arena.²² This type of work requires the capacity to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries, whilst facilitating discursive interaction, being open and vulnerable in relation with collaborators and audience members. These forms of communication and reflection allow for the possibility to take part in a changing world.²³

*What unites dialogical artists is assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.*²⁴

Evaluating a dialogical work is not based in the physicality of an object but is created as an ensemble of effects, dispersed through multiple registers of signification and discursive interaction. There is no single work to be judged and Kester talks of the interactions that take place between artists and audiences as the work of art itself. Operating at numerous points of discursive interaction, each project needs to be analysed individually, in terms of the specific identities and histories of the participants.²⁵ Criticism should analyse these interrelated moments, character and conditions of dialogical exchange in a project.²⁶ Not just any collaborative or conversational encounter constitutes a work of art. *It is not about dialogue per se but the extent to which the artist is able to catalyse emancipatory insights through dialogue.*²⁷

The work can have different meanings according to location and times, producing multiple levels of information as it interacts with other discursive systems, i.e. existing belief systems, ideologies and the psychological make up of participants.²⁸ A more holistic form of analysis needs to be used looking at effects produced by these exchanges and the symbolic value of the world it suggests.²⁹

The public art curator Mary Jane Jacob suggests that art as an *instrument for social change* can be evaluated based on the following:

1. An *emblematic* relationship defined by the ability of the artworks to relate to a social problem or in inspiring social change.
2. A *supportive* form where the work will feed back and relate to a social system or service.
3. A *participatory* relationship where the artwork grows out of a collaborative process, involving complex relationships between artists, community participants, and audiences.³⁰

The artist Suzanne Lacy states her belief: *It is of critical importance to the arts to locate these art practices within the trajectory of art history, to give real texture and meaning to the notion of artist citizenship and in doing so accomplish the reconstruction of the civic relevance of art.*³¹

*Our day and age are not short of political projects, but it is awaiting forms capable of embodying it, and enabling it to become material.*³²

Relevant projects in the field

Historically, numerous artists have used food and exchange as artistic mediums to advance aesthetic goals and to foster critical engagement with the culture of the moment.³³ Carol Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark's legendary (but short-lived) restaurant *FOOD* in 1971, Les Levine's *Levine's Restaurant* and Daniel Spoerri's *Restaurant* all traditionally came from the context of making and selling food with a monetary exchange.^{34,35}

Suzanne Lacy and Linda Pruess's early performance installation *International Dinner Party* (1979) was a 24-hour worldwide dinner happening. The experience of food was used to gather women from a plethora of cultures and honor them in their own regions. Telegrams were sent to the museum, and the location of each dinner was marked on a map of the world with the telegram displayed next to it. The project, with over 2000 participants from all parts of the world, demonstrated how personal communities could form a larger global network.³⁶

Our Cuisine = Our Stories is situated in the historical context of artists engaging with the world around them. Using social engagement and the exchange of information with food to open the consciousness of others to difference, specifically in the current locality of Finland. My work fits into a dialogical aesthetic, collaborating with a broad spectrum of people from a variety of disciplines using storytelling as a base to make changes towards a better world.

In the three examples that follow, food, stories, and exchange are major ingredients in artist-led projects acting as enticement, icon, and talking point.³⁷ They are a connection point in communities and the basis of the project's public strategy of engagement. This forms an important part of its aesthetic language with exchanges not purely focused on economic gain.³⁸

CONFLICT KITCHEN is a restaurant located in central Pittsburgh serving cuisine from countries with which the United States is in conflict.³⁹ Beginning in 2010, it uses the social relations of food and economic exchange to engage the general public in discussions about countries, cultures, and people they may know little about outside of the polarizing rhetoric of governmental politics and the narrow lens of media headlines.⁴⁰

The restaurant creates a constantly changing site for ethnic diversity in relation to current geopolitical events. It has presented the only Iranian, Afghan, Venezuelan, North Korean and Palestinian restaurants in the city. The national themes are accompanied by events, performances, publications, and discussions seeking to expand public engagement with the culture, politics, and issues of the focus region.⁴¹

Food is used as a communication tool and unifying force, filled with the stories and history of a culture adding a human dimension and voice to the *Other*. The food, in addition to the wrapper and programming, spikes conversations creating a platform for debate and a more nuanced discussion of culture and politics.⁴²

The Palestinian version was developed in collaboration with both Palestinians in Palestine and Pittsburgh. The food came packaged in wrappers that included interviews and stories with Palestinians speaking of their experiences on a range of subjects from culture to politics. By exposing customers to these viewpoints, increased curiosity and understanding of other cultures could begin to take place.⁴³

One of the founding artists, Rubin, envisioned a space that could add culinary diversity to the city whilst raising the public profile of minority communities who live and work there.⁴⁴ He claims: *It's very important to us that we're not presenting ourselves as an art project but as something that's within the stream of daily life and commerce in the city.*⁴⁵

ENEMY KITCHEN is a project begun by Michael Rakowitz in 2004. Collaborating with his Iraqi-Jewish mother, he compiled Baghdadi recipes and taught them to different public audiences.⁴⁶ He has been across the U.S. inviting groups to join him in conversation while cooking and eating meals. Conversations that occur over the course of preparing the foods are central to Rakowitz's practice.⁴⁷

For the first incarnation of the project, he cooked with a group of high school students, with some having relatives in the US Army stationed in Iraq. Preparing and consuming the food together opened another channel in which the word *Iraq* and the topic of war could be discussed. Using food as a form of cultural insight, rather than seeing a stream of media images of a war-torn country, allowed the students to draw parallels with their own lives.⁴⁸

He also produced an *Enemy Kitchen* food truck in Chicago, which boasts one of the largest Iraqi expatriate communities in the United States. He collaborated with local Iraqi cooks while Iraq War veterans acted as servers and sous-chefs. Rakowitz observed how few Americans have actually come into contact with an Iraqi or a soldier who served in the war; the mobility of *Enemy Kitchen* extended this opportunity to different publics.⁴⁹

The project provided a space where opinions, myths, and facts that are perpetuated in a country during wartime could be communicated and discussed.⁵⁰ Allowing the public a more sensitive way to engage with this social and global issue regarding a culture they have no personal contact with.

RAMBLING RANGE (2006) was a cargo bicycle converted into a traveling taco stand, complete with solar oven and rocket stove, that artist Nance Klehm rode through the back roads and margins of Copenhagen, Denmark.⁵¹

While exploring garden allotments, back yards, alleys and the perimeters of Copenhagen, food was gathered. As soon as she had enough foraged, bartered, and donated ingredients to start cooking she made homemade tortillas and tacos. The tacos were exchanged for recorded stories about land, migrations, homescapes, dinner tables, and persisting Eros.⁵²

The mobile food-sharing cart exchanging nourishment for local Danish stories exposed people to natural processes and served as a medium for interaction. *The spectacle and the intimacy of the offering made through Rambling Range delighted many and scared off a few*, Klehm says.⁵³

REFLECTIONS

Here we can see the possibilities, but also the difficulties, of art as a social function.⁵⁴ Art has become a complex 'device', a mobile laboratory for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural transformation;⁵⁵ transforming our relations to each other within the open and problematic field of social interaction in the world.⁵⁶

To many artists art has come to take second place to direct political action. To others art has meaning only to the extent that it involves itself in the life of the community around it. Yet others seek relevance for their work as a new, non-logical form of scientific or social inquiry.

Rather than trying to define what socially engaged work actually means it seems more helpful to see the works as a range of affinities of methods, using skill sets from a number of disciplines. Seen from the above examples artists have been engaging in field research, social organising, community rituals, public interventions, educational workshops and audio documentation, serving up food and information along the way.⁵⁷

Despite differences, these projects all share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange.⁵⁸ What binds all these projects '*are experiences based on generosity, usefulness, and pure play*' with an underlying collaboration. It '*involves particular groups and individuals emerging in response to highly specific circumstances*'.⁵⁹

It seems certain that the museum, and the private collection of handmade masterpieces, will be increasingly irrelevant to a generation of artists who have returned to a far older tradition of social integration and interaction.⁶⁰

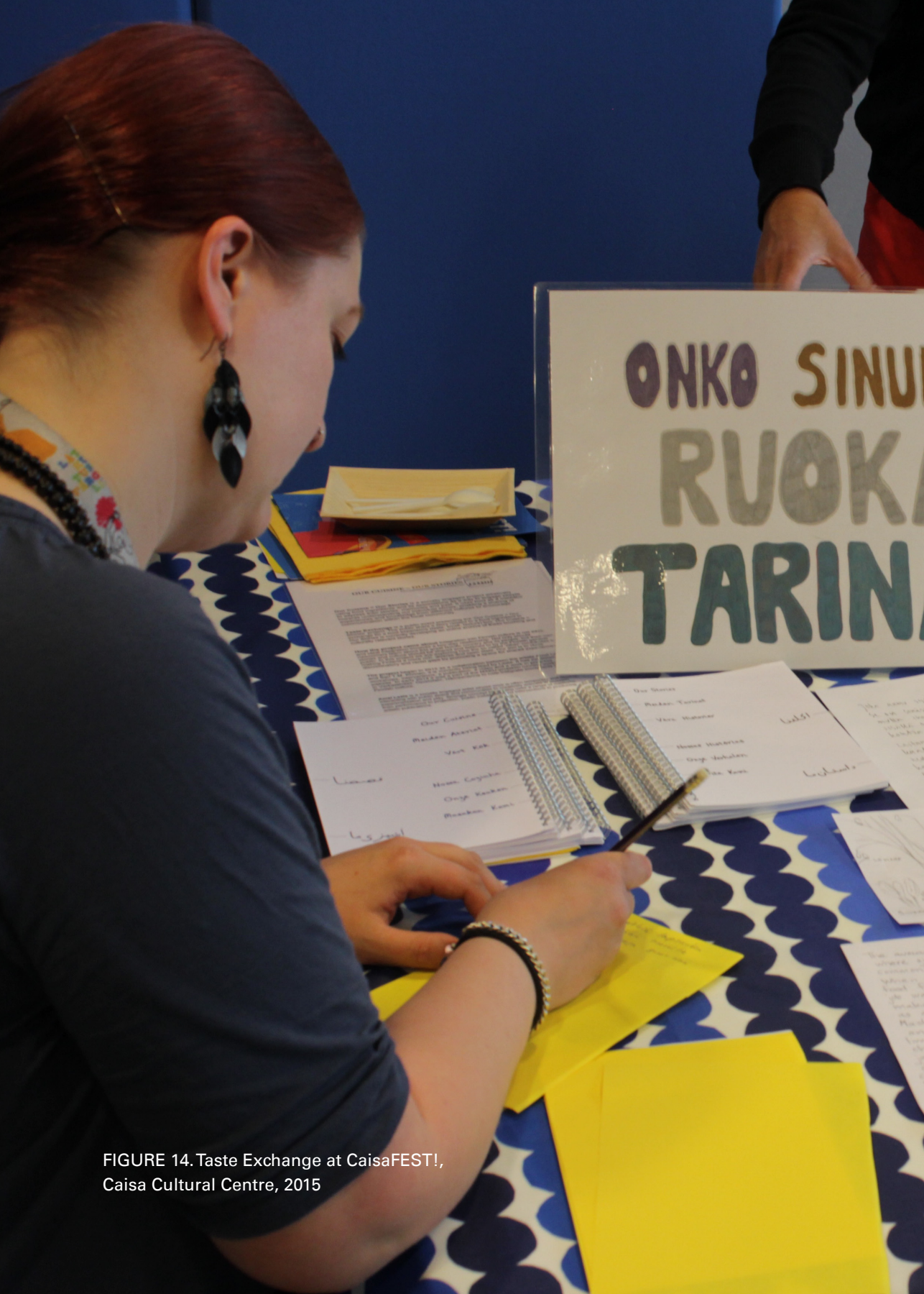
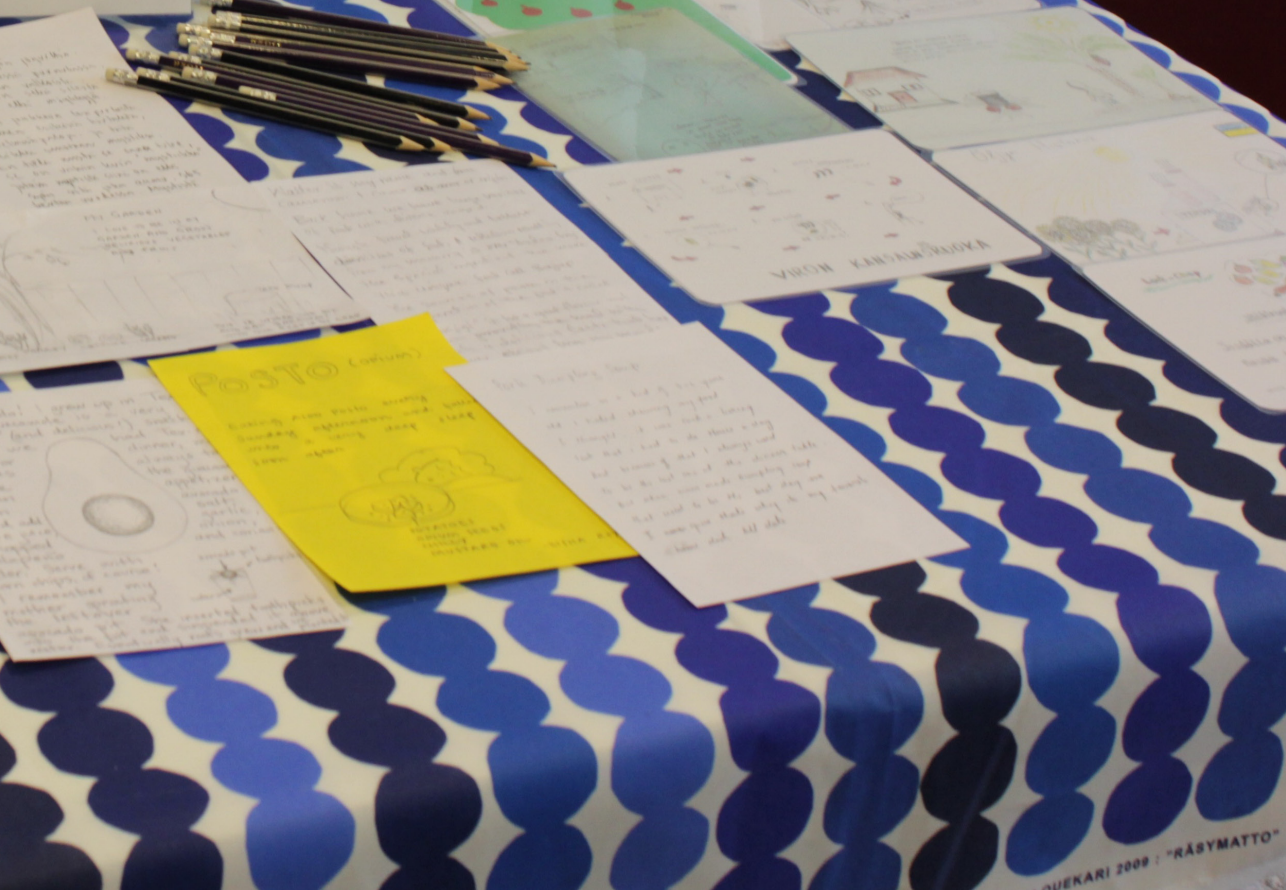


FIGURE 14. Taste Exchange at CaisaFEST!,
Caisa Cultural Centre, 2015

LLA
A
A?



EXCHANGE

Through previous work with Ptarmigan (including *Our Cuisine = Our Stories*) most of the events and programmes had been free. Without a monetary charge we felt the audience or participants did not place as high a value on the experience. Although not wanting to charge the public to participate we also did not want to give something for free. The sharing of the project would then be based on exchange, a taste of the project exchanged for a personal story, working with reciprocity as a form of cultural integration within the community.

Exchange is a central form of social interaction and a catalyst for forming bonds between individuals and societies.⁶¹ Throughout this study exchange refers to the social interactions that attend the exchange of: food, ideas, knowledge, and stories.

Levi-Strauss looked to the unconscious human mind to understand the power of exchange using food in an experiment. He proposed a restaurant scene in which two strangers silently share a table until one offers wine to the other. Once offered, the gift creates a relationship that cannot be undone:

*Wine offered calls for wine returned, cordiality requires cordiality. There is no way of refusing the neighbour's offer of his glass of wine without being insulting. Further, the acceptance of this offer sanctions another offer, for conversation. In this way a whole range of trivial social ties are established by a series of alternating oscillations, in which offering gives one a right, and receiving makes one obligated.*⁶²

From this example it is seen that exchange is not only a simple physical act building relations, but has more complicated subconscious and innate obligations involved. We were to experiment with increased interaction among local community members through exchange, establishing trust so relationships could be strengthened forming new inclusive social structures.⁶³ Exchange can take place both in the physical and on a more complex mental level, affecting society by provoking individuals into changing their manner of living, towards greater ethical thinking, feeling, and most importantly acting.⁶⁴

*A work that consists in a dinner is every bit as material as a statue.*⁶⁵

Taste Exchange

From 2013-2015 *Taste Exchange*, an intervention/exchange, was developed and took place in six different locations in Finland and Estonia. It began as a space from which public dialogue could emerge and personal interactions could take place through story.

The workshops were always small and closed groups, so it was important outcomes were available in the local community to promote intercultural sharing. Approaching the public from a position of openness and vulnerability, my intention was to create a critically reflexive consciousness among viewers.⁶⁶

The exchange between the viewer and the artwork would be used to raise questions about broader social interactions and our tendency to revert to reductive stereotypes when confronted with people whom we perceive as different from ourselves.⁶⁷ Blurring boundaries between self and the other would open participants to explore their own personal foundations of discrimination, investigating how identities can be in negotiation and partially transformed over time through our encounters with others.⁶⁸ Viewers could see problems and issues from a different perspective through the creation of forms, images, and metaphors transmitting personal stories.⁶⁹ These interactions and exchanges would challenge dominant representations of other cultures in Finland creating a more complex understanding, and empathy for them, among a broader public.⁷⁰

In 2013, after workshops the previous year, Sari and I began conversations with the public, listening to their stories whilst exposing them to others.

The public could share a story related to a food ingredient in exchange for an experience of the project in the form of a surprise (taste, smell, texture) box, essentially getting a taste of the project in exchange for a personal story.

Taste Exchange consisted of: a table, a tablecloth, Chinese takeaway boxes, napkins, food, stories, pencils, paper, smells, tastes, flavours, and discussions. The following is an account of the happenings.

MARCH 2013, STOA CULTURAL CENTRE, HELSINKI

Our Cuisine = Our Stories was invited to take part in an experimental live art event: IRVi – One night in the week against racism. We launched a publication, performed, and presented the first *Taste Exchange* event.

A table at the side of the room was set up with freshly printed zines, food ingredients the public could explore, and Chinese take away boxes. Each box had a food ingredient accompanied with a personal story regarding that ingredient. While the audience was sitting, chatting, and waiting for the next performance they took pencils and paper from the tables and an instruction card:

Think about one food ingredient. Write a short description about an association or memory you have about this food ingredient. Take your description to the 'Our Cuisine = Our Stories' table in exchange for a taste sensation!

Slowly over the night a variety of people came to exchange their stories:

Well, food. In Finnish. Peruna. Potato like my nose. I like my nose. But I hate to stand in a potato field with my rubber boots, which are sinking into the mud. The more I try to get out, the more they sink. I cry for help. The worst thing is my friend is also there. We are sinking in the potato field. We were six. Now I am thirty-six and I am here with my potato nose.

Almost all the audience came, chatted, and gave us a story in exchange for a box. Writing at their tables gave them time to contemplate and not feel pressured. Although specifically an art audience, we could test initial reactions and gauge elements to be developed. By receiving these touching and culturally relevant stories we could begin an archive whilst gaining contact with a broader public.

SEPTEMBER 2013 – KAUPPATORI, HELSINKI

After the second series of workshops *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* presented *Taste Exchange* at Helsinki's open-air market (Kauppatori). The market square is located near the centre of Helsinki, bordering the Baltic Sea and is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the city. From spring to autumn it is bustling with activity with vendors selling fresh Finnish food, souvenirs and there are many outdoor cafés.⁷¹

Arriving at the square and setting up, the workshop participants brought the item they had previously made, to share in the boxes. There was pumpkin pie, miso beans, apple juice, fennel salad and a sweet mint treat. Inside the boxes a food item, story and napkin were placed and signs put round the table:

Do you have a food story to share?

Onko sinulla ruoka tarina?

Slowly people began asking questions, interested to find out what we were doing and what was in the boxes! A Finnish woman looked out onto the sea thinking about a memory and story to share:

A Finnish Lake fish HAUKI

I remember my childhood summers in our summerhouse next to a beautiful lake, my brother used to spend hours and hours trying to catch – a big one. Once he succeeded and brought home a beautiful self caught fish of 7kgs. He was so proud. Many photos were taken. I was always too scared of fish or to go fishing with him. The fish lasted for 3 dinners, shared by 4 people. Good times.

She then chose from the tower of boxes. Opening it she read:

The pumpkin is autumn, it is thanksgiving, it is Halloween, it is American, it is childhood. Most people use canned pumpkin to make their pies, which is actually quite good. But for a truly excellent pie roast your own pumpkin, it is more fun, more satisfying and the only option if you live in a Nordic country on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

She was excited to receive a small delicious treat from the other side of the world. We got many tourists interested in the exchange, several speaking of restaurants or cafes they liked, but some were much more personal:

I was born in a west city in China. When I was 12 years old I began my unknowing life. I changed and lived in 3-4 cities in China. After 18 years I went to St. Petersburg. So it's the first city I stayed so long. But in the last year I lost my grandma. When I went back to the city in which I was born I tasted the beef noodles. That made me cry because it tastes of grandma. Whatever where I am, whatever what I do every time when I missed my country my memory about the noodle beef and that soup is coming out. So every time when I go back to China I have to get it. The beef noodles, that's a smile of the memory of my city.

Tears formed as I read, it was beautiful to see, from a simple interaction, that a short handwritten story could be so revealing and sensitive.

Although meeting with many people, gathering their stories and speaking about the project, we questioned tourist's contributions, as they are not Finnish residents. How do their stories contribute, or not, to the local narrative?

OCTOBER 2013 - GRANITIN AUKIO, RIIHIMÄKI

Taste Exchange was presented as part of the Art Häme festival in Granitin Aukio, Riihimäki, a meeting point in the city centre with a market area and stage for events. We set the table and put signs out front as part of a Sunday market with locals selling produce from their gardens and farms, homemade cakes and handicrafts.

Using material from previous workshops we gathered food association stories from the locals in exchange for a food experience box.

Many people were intrigued by what we were doing, but when asked to participate were not interested in the exchange. We spoke about the project with some market goers and even had the local newspaper interview and photograph a participant while writing a story. Finally we had 10 people participate and exchange their stories for a box. We walked away from this experience asking: When the public is not willing to encounter the *Other*, in this case Sari and myself, how can the basis of ethical relations be founded?⁷²

OCTOBER 2013 – PTARMIGAN, TALLINN

Taste Exchange was presented in a slightly different format at the Ptarmigan space in Tallinn. It was a small group of five artists who knew the project but had never participated. We had chosen stories from both the workshops and the *Taste Exchanges* to read. While the group was blindfolded Sari and I took turns reading the stories with the other dispersing ingredients mentioned via smell, touch and taste. We wanted to present our project findings by instigating conversation through the stories and flavours that had been so important in the artistic process. Using a *Taste Exchange* interaction to contemplate and describe the project enabled us to develop layers and speak about the project in art terms to suit the audience.

JULY 2014 - GALLERIA KONE, HÄMEENLINNA

Taste Exchange was part of the opening night for the MAKU-Projektin loppunäytely, at Galleria Kone. *Taste Exchange* boxes were prepared and throughout the night people's stories collected while chatting about food, the project, and life in Finland. There was a mix of people from the workshop participants to their families and the local public. The variety of languages and local stories varied greatly.

My whole life revolves around food, girls and music. Thus my memories are all tied to tastes, curves and sounds. Each girl I've dated brings a meal or a song to mind. Each city I have visited as well. Right now I am dreaming of eating raspberries off the belly of this cute redhead I'm currently dating.

Strongly connecting food to people, the storyteller was continually learning of new foods and dishes according to his significant others. We often do this through the people closest to us: mothers, grandmothers, and partners. Common food experiences shared were: new tastes experienced in foreign countries and items eaten daily.

Pencils and paper were left throughout the exhibition period with a note to share a story of a food ingredient. Three people left stories.

JUNE 2015 – CAISA CULTURAL CENTRE, HELSINKI

Taste Exchange was involved in CaisaFEST!, a two day cultural block party for the whole family, setting a place for people to exchange a story regarding food. Next to me was a woman carving fruit and vegetables into amazing flowers and across the room local people were selling Somali, Nigerian, Filipino and Asian cuisines. Participating with others working with food from a variety of cultures I quickly noticed it was clearly business for them. They were happy to share food and presentation techniques, but for a price. A Finnish man came to the table and shared:

'Every morning I eat yoghurt. It is in a blue container, but it is pretty white. It has a smooth consistency and also lumpy bits. From a glass jar pours out a variety of flakes, pieces of fruit, and all this is called muesli. I don't know where the word comes from, it is a bit like "mysticism" - there is something mystical about it, that I eat it every morning, 365 times a year. Mystical muesli!'

He seemed a little uncomfortable with expressing not only a story, but also an action showing his personality. Comforting him I spoke of my Finnish grandmother eating porridge for breakfast for 30 years and being proud to tell the story. He could not remember when he had had something other than yoghurt and muesli for breakfast and joked that now his routine was out in the open that maybe it was time for a change. With this simple story the participant fully engaged with the project's concept of sharing something of himself and in return he received not only a box, but also insight into his own life and daily actions.

Once stories were on the table, people were intrigued, coming to share or simply to read. Although some did not contribute they still mentally engaged with the *Other* by reading their stories. In Finland, and throughout the project, I have

found it difficult to engage people on the spot. Many have a tendency to find out what is required and then, when comfortable, return to participate.

Over the two days more than forty people wrote and drew about their funny, heart-warming, and delicious food ingredients for a surprise box, experiencing new tastes, such as: cassava, fennel, and mint. Often participants opened the box with a 'what is this?' face but most tried the food saying if they liked or disliked it and what it reminded them of. The most unusual ingredient in the boxes was fried cassava. There were many questions about what it was, some expected it to be sweet like pineapple and were surprised it was savoury. Although initially unsure, people read Flavia's story and took a bite.

SHORT REFLECTION

To have people experience new cultures through taste, smell, touch, sight, and a story for their ears, made the project worthwhile. Being present for people to interact was important, as many were unsure if they even had a story others would want to read. These personal encounters allowed me to be present to people's needs, sometimes simply to listen about a strange food they had eaten. Throughout the process I sensed from people's reactions and questions that this quick interaction made them think about *others* living in their society.

Although at times not engaging with a large number of public, *Taste Exchange* did work in many different spaces and places. Being a part of festivals and events allowed less organisational work in setting up the public intervention, but did not insure a larger number of people would interact with the project. For some of the exchanges I was alone, so having people slowly come and go allowed me to spend time and listen to their stories and ideas on the project. This made the interactions more fruitful as there is much people do not write but express verbally.

These small insights into our surroundings and making slight mental changes can allow one's ethical life to be set in motion through self-transformation, making big changes within ourselves and the society around us.⁷³ Our relation to ourselves, to others, and to social systems can become more ethical, more animated, by taking responsibility for the Other.⁷⁴ *Taste Exchange* allowed the first steps towards this responsibility to be taken.

Other Our Cuisine = Our Stories outcomes

PUBLICATION

After the initial workshops in 2012 Sari and I began the process of collating a publication (zine) that reflected the meetings and its process.

A zine is most commonly a small circulation of self-published work with original or appropriated texts and images usually reproduced via photocopier.⁷⁵ By their very nature, zines revolt against the aesthetic of the mass-produced, big-budget, commercially controlled, and globally marketed publication, to embrace an honest aesthetic of a cut-and-paste technique. As the ultimate form of lo-fi mass communication and image dissemination, zines are truly anti-establishment and a creative expression by the people for the people.⁷⁶

In Australia they are one of the most vibrant forms of underground creative expression, with a rapidly expanding network of both makers and collectors.⁷⁷ In Finland we found most of the small and limited edition publications were very professionally designed and printed. Both Sari and I had previously produced zines, as they epitomised the hands on do-it-yourself ethos of our artistic practices. We thought a handmade publication, with pages of handwritten text, collaged images and drawings, would perfectly represent the messiness of the workshop process. Laying out the material produced, we began gathering them into sections:

THE TABLE & CONVERSATION – Conversations around the table had its own section which documented a snippet of the many conversations had.

MAPS & LINES – Mapped the participant's journeys and migration trails by exploring lines of movement and lineage.

MEALS IN THE KITCHEN – Focused on the meals prepared in the kitchen and presented practical production and recipes.

With the large amount of material the process of assembling it was extremely time consuming. We needed to decide what would be included and omitted, making sure all group members' foods and stories were represented. We also needed to print, cut, paste, and design the layout of each page along with the overall layout. After a month we finally had all pages completed and in our hands. We decided to ask a graphic designer friend if she could do the cover and collate the pages digitally. After looking over what we had created she wanted to do a hand written cover. Because it would be hand written it would be time consuming so her fee would be quite high. We decided to do the cover ourselves and we quickly and basically learned how to generate it into a digital format, taking the handmade publication to get photocopied for dispersion.

PERFORMANCE

The experimental live art event in Stoa Cultural Centre, March 2013, where the first *Taste Exchange* was presented, began with a performance by four of the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* participants. Moving around the space we each had a large bowl, simultaneously pouring, shaking, or dropping our chosen ingredient into it. One by one we told a personal story in our own language while interacting with the audience.

Pranuthi had a bowl of coconut milk, enticing the audience with its scent. She spoke of its culinary use and her family in the kitchen in India, in both her native dialect and in English. Sari had a couple dozen eggs and spoke of gathering warm eggs laid by the chickens she had as a child, her own fertility, and how she used eggs today. Breaking them one at a time into her bowl and over her head, the insides running down her face. Pilvi spoke of dill, in Finnish, waving it around eliciting an intense and refreshing smell. Carrying a bowl of black olives I spoke in Darija (Moroccan Arabic) offering toothpicks and olives to some and spitting pips at others. Telling my story with a mouth full of olives.

Sari and I had previously performed together and were experimenting with how people could artistically, using all their senses, engage with the project's stories. We received feedback about the interesting use of language, but I felt the expressive style and audience were not correct for the project. Initially, we were very adamant there would be no artists (besides ourselves) involved in the workshops. It did not seem fitting that workshop outcomes had turned into a performance, which was done specifically for an art audience.

EXHIBITIONS

Our Cuisine = Our Stories showed work in two exhibitions in 2014:

1. *MAKU-Projektin loppunäyttely*, at Galleria Kone, Hämeenlinna in July, and
2. *Public space*, at Kulte Gallery & Editions, Rabat in November.

In the first, an installation presenting the project was shown on a table, including recipe cards (with participants stories/drawings), Chinese takeaway boxes from *Taste Exchange*, information about the project (text and images), the publication, and paper and pencils for people attending the exhibition to leave a story related to a food ingredient.

In the second, a photographic installation consisting of four photographs, handwritten stories in Arabic, French and English, and bread, were placed on the gallery wall. The exhibition material was produced from workshops with the locals.

In both cases the work was very well received with much interest in the project's sensitive and socially engaged way of working. This way of working is not common in Finland or in Morocco and having the work as part of exhibitions, surprisingly, opened the project to new audiences. The gallery gave time to contemplate the work on many levels, which could not be achieved with the other project outcomes because of their fleeting and social nature. Although at first sceptical, I saw many

positive elements for the project's development and future through exhibition.

In March 2015 the video 'Maliminkartano Tales', produced from the workshops in October the year before, was shown in Stoa Cultural Centre's lobby as part of the Satakielikuukausi festival (The Month of a Hundred Languages).

ONLINE

In the first year of the project a blog was produced where weekly updates were made showing activities, sharing recipes and conversations. This was meant to be a collaborative process and all had access, but Sari and myself added most things.

In the second year, wanting more of an online presence and a way to document the project, we produced a website. It was a slow but important process in structuring and designing the representation of the project for a wider audience to have access to the documentation. The news section of the website is consistently updated with the project's events and workshops. There are specific sections on the workshops and *Taste Exchange* events giving more information. Although time consuming, and often needing to be updated, the website has been an important element in allowing the public access to the project and its process over the years. It puts forward a project aesthetic whilst allowing people to see the project's progress and outcomes.

Overall reflections

Throughout this chapter I have discussed the various outcomes, which came from the initial workshops mentioned in chapter 3, giving short reflections throughout. The main purpose was to interact with a broad section of the public to engage them both face-to-face and through the project content. Dialogues through interactions with participants were extremely important to see what needed to be developed and enhanced; taking the project into a new direction that would be more relevant for its purpose. Many different social and artistic techniques were experimented with, each adding another layer and 'food for thought' about future paths the project could take.

In the conclusion I provide an evaluation of the research questions that have been explored throughout this process. I also elaborate on the possible futures of the project after the completion of this thesis.



FIGURE 15. Detail from the Zine produced from the first series of workshops, 2012



Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Our Cuisine = Our Stories has been thought provoking by providing a space where people could see and experience relevant social issues in a new way.

Throughout the project's stages I dove deeper into pedagogical, social and art theory, which modified thoughts on the project's path and structure. Through interactions I could sense structural changes that needed to be made to suit emerging needs. The work was a balance of abstract and distanced theory and the immediacy and experimentation of art.

Below I have evaluated the initial research questions along with discussing future possibilities that could emerge from the study.

Evaluating research questions

In this study, I explored findings for several research questions.

The first involved structuring a learning process between different cultures. To understand the learning that took place throughout the project I observed interactions in different settings, both public and private, using practical and theoretical research measures. During these observations it was essential I was part of the community, taking on many roles in different stages of the project, i.e. facilitator, artist, documenter, storyteller. Communication skills were crucial, along with being personally vulnerable and honest in expressing my experiences in order to gain

trust and reciprocal narratives. With my own 'foreigner' identity, the social issues associated with integration in Finland affect me daily and were used to encourage others to express their own experiences.

Regarding the structure, I learned the importance of having a strong outline with flexibility for emerging needs and changing situations. Developing the workshops and its pedagogical activities over a three year period, showed the activities were invaluable in instigating participants to express themselves. These activities allowed a complex network of social learning to take place throughout the course of the project.

Evaluating the second research question on personal insights gained through public exchanges was a more complicated task. According to Kester when presenting our views to others we articulate them more systematically, anticipating our interlocutor's responses, seeing ourselves from the other's point of view. We become more self-critical and aware of our own opinions leading us to see our views, and our identities, as contingent and subject to creative transformation.¹ So the act of participating in these exchanges makes us better able to engage in discursive encounters and decision-making processes in the future, allowing an openness to unassimilated otherness.

In working with delicate issues among the public, food and art were essential elements in the communication process. They formed a basis for people from different cultures to begin exchanging their cultural values and traditions along with current experiences. Through food and art, dialogue developed and was not just a tool for communication but began a deeper process of self-transformation.²

But how much did this socially engaged approach contribute to an increased awareness of current social, political, and personal issues?

In any process of change, time is vital. A subtle and imperfect process of transformation passes through phases of coherence, vulnerability, closure, and re-coherence.³ To date this project's four-year span has allowed cumulative changes to take form, both personally and socially.

While it may be presumptuous to assume that a work of socially engaged art can radically change prevailing cultural attitudes, it can add to an archive of ideas about how art can respond to and challenge a sociopolitical problem.⁴ Many societal issues cannot be resolved by free and open exchange, as they are the result of a very clear understanding of material, economic, and political differences.⁵ The system is in tatters with the cause of social problems resting with the systemic or structural conditions of capitalist labour markets, stratified social hierarchy, and uneven distribution of wealth and resources.⁶ The essence of the project was to empower people to become more tolerant towards others whilst learning to inhabit the world in a better way. Whilst working with individuals from different communities, each acquired information to disperse within their own communities, so building tangible models of sociability.⁷

Future possibilities of the study

Our Cuisine = Our Stories will continue to develop after this study, both locally in Finland and internationally. Whilst working on the project in Morocco I saw its relevance regarding personal encounters, not only in Finland but also worldwide.

From investigating the *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* interventions and outcomes whilst comparing them to examples of other socially engaged work, the next step is to implement the project on a larger scale, without my physical presence.

CURRENTLY I ENVISION TWO OPTIONS:

1. Speaking to government to incorporate these techniques in the current integration structures.
2. Building an online platform based on the structure developed throughout the project process.

The first example would be implemented in the form of dinner events. These events would consist of people from a variety of professions, such as: people in government, cleaners and both ethnic Finns and *Others* living in Finland. Similar to the workshops but allowing for a larger audience, up to forty, each table will participate in activities getting to know each other and different cultures using all their senses. The first dinner event will take place in November this year trialing the format.

In the second example a website would form the basis of the project, allowing people to meet. Two workshops will be held as part of the Pixelache festival this September where a format will be tested that could be used for the website.

Both these examples encourage contact with others in their own cities allowing a sharing to take place and a generosity towards others. These interactions would allow people to experience diversity in their community, making space for tolerance and trust.⁸ The second option seems more realistic as a structure would be put into place allowing the project to continue without my physical presence, unlike the first example.

At the end of 2016 *Our Cuisine = Our Stories* will have an exhibition in Virka Gallery in Helsinki City Hall. This will show both new photographs and a culmination of the material and stories gathered throughout the projects process. A dinner event with people working for the city and the *Other* will accompany it.

Our Cuisine = Our Stories was not only academic research, but also an important personal journey. My ideas on what art is and could be were challenged. Through interactions and exchanges with others, I gained personal insights into my inner character and confronted my biases.

Our Cuisine = Our Stories was developed over time becoming more relevant and connected to societal issues and has been an attempt to deal with pre-existing social systems contributing to an ongoing conversation and dialogue with the public.



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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

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